

2016

Spectrum, 2016

Northwestern College

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Spectrum

Northwestern College Literary Arts Magazine

Spectrum

2016 Editorial Staff

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Notes

Through the writing process, we discover and put form to the tangled thoughts, feelings, and histories inside of us. This year's Spectrum brings nature, parting, love, death, and wonder together in a many-colored collage. Some pieces are smooth and reflective, and others are rough-edged and passionate, but each story, essay, image, and poem invites us on a journey through new imaginings of the human experience. Together, these varied fragments test our ways of thinking and inspire us in our own creativity.

Living with these works over the past few months—reading and discussing and editing—has challenged me to study new styles and encounter unfamiliar lives. May this collection do the same for you, and may it inspire you to keep joining in this artistic conversation.

-Trevor Delamater
Copy Editor

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Poetry

First Place -

Liz Meier

"Now that We're Not Talking"

Second Place -

Jen Te Grotenhuis

"Holy Chaos"

Honorable Mentions -

Mallory Bjork

"Night Flight"

Brianna Mullaney

"For Darryl Jansma"

First Place

Judge's Notes:

Poetry is distilled language—nothing wasted. This poem wastes not and wants not. I also admire the line breaks—chosen to pull the reader into the next line while placing emphasis on certain resonant words such as “snatching” or “ripple.” The poet has employed an inventive, striking metaphor as well: combing through thoughts. Plus, the poem makes an important turn, asking us to reconsider everything that’s been said.

Now That We're Not Talking

By Liz Meier, English Teaching

I remember you snatching
my phone one day during lunch,
opening our favorite app,
and tapping the green follow button
next to your name.

It used to tingle the tips of my fingers, ripple
my heartbeat like smooth stones skipping
across glassy water,
when the *currently playing* sidebar
flashed the green speaker next to your picture,
and I could see we were playing music
from the same playlist.
That made me feel forest green
like brand new leaves on April trees.

I would wonder if you
were thinking about me
when you chose those songs—almost
like you'd combed through my thoughts,
the way your fingers would my hair,
to find melodies that I liked—maybe
more than you.

The problem with Spotify
 is that your name still floats
 to the top of that sidebar
 and we're still listening
 to the same music.
 Only now I feel neon green
 like the nauseating glow
 of chemical light.

Second Place -

Sea Te Grotenhuis

"Holy Chaos"

Honorable Mentions -

Mallory Boyd

"Night Flight"

Brianna Muller

"For Darryl Jay"

Second Place

Judge's Notes:

To choose a subject as sweet and predictable as a Christmas pageant is to risk sentimentality and clichés. This poet rises above such dangers by delivering vivid winsome details and by re-creating a believable child's point of view. Children know "wonder" in a way that adults don't. And because the poet offers us a rich set of images from a child's point of view (helping us to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the past), we are all invited back to our first, primal sense of wonder.

Holy Chaos

By Jen Te Grotenhuis, Social Work

Tiny hands yanked at clip-on ties and
curls in scrunchies bounced as our little bodies hurried
down the red carpeted aisle
on that frosty December night.
We'd been unleashed from marshmallow coats
in order to be a part of something that we'd anticipated
(some with terror, but most with excitement)
for a whole year.
We moseyed toward center stage amidst
bright flashes and blinking red lights
and beaming moms and dads.
The recently lit Advent candles caused the space to
smell a little like
the campfire the shepherds might have been huddled
around the night of our Savior's birth.
Lining the risers, we took our places to aide
in sharing the greatest story ever told.
A Sunday school teacher gave one girl
a look, meaning,
'That is not what we do with our dress, young lady.'
We looked out over the crowded sanctuary
(that one kid started bawling)

and stood smiling and waiting
(cue waving and "Mom! Hi, Mom!").
The director took his position, creaked
the music stand into place, looked right into our eager faces—
round as the cherubs who sang for Jesus himself—
and he whispered,
"Blow the roof off this place!"
So—
eyes gleaming with mischievous delight,
cheeks swelling like peachy balloons,
like the bubble gum waiting in my classroom for later,
unable to contain the depth of our excitement—
we sucked all the oxygen surrounding our faces
into ourselves,
held it captive for a moment,
then unleashed it in holy chaos.
Hefty and jumbled,
the noise may have clashed in the ears
of a passerby,
but to us it was worship, and I knew because
tiny little bumps of awe appeared on my arms,
something inside of me pushing its way out
to say,
"This. This is good."

Honorable Mention

Night Flight

By Mallory Bjork, English Teaching

I plod along pristine sidewalks
in this utopian town,
craving the crisp crunch
of leaves under my sneakers,
but they've all been swept away

The soft patter of my Chucks
bounces off sleeping houses
dressed in ginger-bread
Dutch design, a sickening
sweetness

An occasional flashing blue glow
breaks curfew and
lights a living room window

I suddenly detest the
thought of growing up,
another sleeping house
with a spotless lawn
in a perfect town

I quicken my stride,
an eerie feeling spurs me on—
houses opening stern eyes
as I walk past,
judging the solitary stranger
who dares disrupt their peace

Finally,
I seek shelter amongst the few
trees in an empty park
and sit,
the cool night air

reviving, awakening me
more to my
surroundings

My knuckles whiten
as my swing becomes a
slingshot to the heavens,
soaring higher than the trees,
cool breezes toss
my blonde hair,
lightning dancing in the night

I'm completely alone,
but not lonely,
no lost boy in need of company
as I talk with God,
telling Him my flooding thoughts,
each arc of the swing like a
wave surfed
in the nighttime Neverland

I laugh girlishly as my
prayers Peter Pan me,
and I leap,

f

l

o

a

t

i

n

g

arms wide
up and up to the
star that shines
second from the right



Finger Paint is not Limited to Fingers

By Caroline Trewet, Theatre

Honorable Mention

For Darryl Jansma

By Brianna Mullaney, English Teaching

You were forty-nine when—
for forty-five minutes—your heart
stopped.

Colleen was at home
making your secret ribs.
Bradley was at school
learning to do the work you love—
farming—and Ashley
was in Washington D.C., missing
your phone calls and discussing
government affairs.

I was with my family,
playing mini golf.

Ashley texted me:
Dad had a heart attack.
Waiting for a plane home.

The smile on my face
sank. My chest was tight—
so tight I couldn't breathe.
Is that was a heart attack
feels like, Darryl?

Your family was sure
you'd be all right.
You were tough;
a fighter.

I came to see you
in the hospital,

but wasn't allowed
to view your graying hair or
machine-run body.

So Ashley and I did homework—
accounting. Did you know that's her major?
Brad and I discussed sports—football mostly—and
Colleen and I chatted
about how Ash was going
to need me.

I think she knew.

Three days later,
I got the long,
heartbreaking text.
You were brain dead, and
so they unplugged you.

I was about to play
a softball game.

You know are missed,
right?
Once, a worldly cherub.
Now,
a literal angel.

My second dad—

You'd be so proud of your kids, Darryl.
Ashley's doing great in accounting. Did she get that from you?
Bradley is taking up the farm like you had hoped.
I'm going to be an English teacher—

teach my students someday
to write poems and remember
the people they love.

I dedicated that softball game to you.
We almost won, Dad. You
should've seen it. (And I know you did.)
We tried real hard, but just

couldn't pull through.

I know you did the same.

Swimming in God's Love

By Amie Adams, Writing and Rhetoric

"Christianity is about water...It's about full immersion, about falling into something elemental and wet. Most of what we do in worldly life is geared toward staying dry, looking good, not going under. But in baptism, in lakes and rain and tanks and fonts, you agree to do something that's a little sloppy because at the same time it's also holy, and absurd. It's about surrender, giving in to all those things we can't control; it's a willingness to let go of balance and decorum and get drenched."

— Anne Lamott

On the first weekend of September
three weeks before my sixteenth
birthday I was baptized in
the shockingly cold water of Lake Okoboji
by my summer camp director and
a pastor with a friendly face who
I met that morning.

Wading barefoot,
crisp water seeped into the pastor's
dress pants and up to the hem
of my bright red shirt—
My lifeguard walks on water printed
across the chest.

I was lowered on their outstretched arms
as they pastor proclaimed
"I baptize you in the name of the Father,"
and then they dunked me—

water flooding my mouth and nose
like drowning until I felt myself rising
in their grasp, returned
to the surface sputtering,
and gasping for breath,
the pastor saying,

"and of the Son"—
and back down with a splash,
eyes shut tightly and my hand
covering my nose this time, holding
my breath and being yanked

Poetry

back into the windy sunlight,
hair plastered to my scalp—

"and of the Holy Spirit!"

he proclaimed and plunged
me once more washing
away who I once was
so I could rise again,
made new.

I left Michigan in May

By Liz Meier, English Teaching

With 900 miles to go,
I only stop for a moment
at the Blair Street Pier
on the ocean-wide expanse
of Lake Huron because I am sure
I'll return to see crests of frozen waves,
sculpted by the Grand Artist,
in December.

I disregard the lump

in my throat and the few escaped tears
sliding down my cheeks that warn me,
"Seven months is a long time" and I fly
down the highway
in the direction the sun will set tonight.

In October this road is called the color tour—
oranges, reds, and golden yellows seeping
into each other, past

Lachine,

Hillman,

Atlanta. The color canopy

lining the pavement designed
by that one masterful Artist.

In early summer, though, all the leaves
are green and the stripy shadows they cast
on the road swish past

Mancelona,

Kalkaska,

Cadillac, so quickly

I think I'm blinking.

I've driven M-32 so many times that
I settled into the routine of leaving
and coming back, the route burned in my brain
like the trail of veins on my wrists.

This time I ignore it.

I don't take enough time to notice
the way the roller coaster road
twists, turns up around hills, dips into valleys
my stomach dropping
to my pink painted toes
when I set the cruise too high.

Practically running on autopilot,
was not how I said goodbye to my family
when they left me in Iowa at 5 a.m.
on New Year's Day.

I hugged my dad last
until my arms were numb,
eyelids drooping. When he finally pried
open my vice grip, he whispered
"It's not goodbye;
it's see you later,"

and with 900 miles to go,
left in the direction of the sunrise.

I don't keep my vice grip on Michigan
like I did my dad, because people move
and places don't, and I am so sure
I'll go back.

I don't know that the Artist will have other plans.

I don't know that my family
will pack up our home in October,
box up the memories without me,
drive through an autumn
snowstorm that obscures
final glimpses of the color tour.

I only know these 900 miles ahead of me.
So I drive.

These Four Walls

By Nicole Montgomery, English Teaching

I am a mime
confined to the
four walls
of my invisible glass box.
A confining space:
always a sanctuary,
never a prison.

My costume is not
the black and white face paint
of the silent clown,
yet I mask discomfort
by forcing a smile when I'm
surrounded.

Eyes move like a pendulum from
smiling face to interlaced fingers,
always seeking approval.
Dressing so as not to draw
attention to the

ELEPHANT

in the room—
my thick-hided nature, yet
I always manage
to be discovered.

I extend my arms,
flatten my sweaty palms
against the walls of the
invisible box,
wanting to interact, still
praying the pane
never yields.

Friends unwittingly
shatter
my safe place—
driving hammers
through the glass box I
imagine

Poetry
around myself.

I see the hammer spin, in
slow motion, glass shards flying,
cutting

gashing

drawing blood.

And this blood must be true
even if all else is a lie.

Panicked, frenzied, I

scramble

to reconstruct

my glass world

from its shards.

Only when my wall is rebuilt

am I safe,

am I myself.

My hiding place,

restored

I remind myself:

even through these

transparent walls

few look close enough

to see

me.

Leaky Faucet

By Jen Te Grotenhuis, Social Work

Like a leaky faucet into a plugged sink basin,
she showed herself.

Dropping wet, tangible glimpses—
too minute, too few to hold or recognize
at first,

yet enough that we noticed
that unique personality.

Felt it there as we held our palms underneath later on,
testing whether the rhythmic

drip

drip

dripping

still pooled her face full.

We panicked as the space between droplets of moisture

stretched.

We waited.

Thought maybe all the men,

boys really,

had somehow completely halted

the flow of who we knew her

to be.

Waited some more.

Dried our hands and turned away.

Drip.

Still the rhythm persisted.

Erratic now, never constant.

It had been slowing all this time.

And when we leaned in close

to get a better look,

we saw the bead forming,

growing

like a cocoon,

cracking.

And our eyes, this time, fluttered

down

into the basin.

And there she was.

All the tiny fragments of herself

Poetry

pooling in the basin.
Slowly settling what she was,
And adding who she is.

His Eyes

By Marie Jeppesen, English Teaching

I tell him, are blue.

The kind that expands and engulfs

his features like the

ocean that overwhelms the entire globe,

pushing and pulling at the

continents that crack and divide like the crumbling stone of cathedrals.

They loom, casting a downward glance over the ones beneath him.

Down there, those below quiver in fear,

trembling,

never feeling worthy of his judging stare.

They cower as they watch their own reflections glisten in the blue.

The images begin to tremble and

swirl, eventually

streaming down his face and crashing on the ground

causing the Earth to crack and divide again,
and again.

Faults seen from ecstasies

unreachable

speckling the blackness like hundreds of

dimples that cover a summer strawberry or the Sun-

freckles spotting his nose.

Not that you can see them behind the

all encompassing

blue.



Nom

By Caroline Trewet, Theatre

My Bugged Brain

By Marie Jeppesen, English Teaching

I watch as you step outside
My eyes lingering on the screened door that
Separates you from the real world
You say you need to be alone with your thoughts
It's this phrase that sends shivers

*Stop.
Smoke break.
That feeling just fills me up.
I know it's an ugly habit –
I went to middle school.*

But the feeling...

*When I inhale and hold it...
Does it hum?
Is that the word?
Then I exhale and these clouds,
man, are they killer.*

*Out here, I can indulge in the truths.
Inside, I'm forced to swallow them
and keep them bottled up.
On this side of the screened door,
the truth flows as effortlessly as the
rolls of smoke through the air:*

*My parents have stolen 6.8 million dollars from me.
I am a Nobel Peace Prize Winner.
A super genius.*

Our brains are designed to build us up and
Tell us all of the greatness within us
In this sense you aren't unique
We grow up with every intention of
Being a princess or
Saving the world

Only we conformed to more realistic beliefs
You did not

The truth does have its issues though.

Work? Don't make me laugh.

What kind of Nobel Prize winner works as a mechanic?

No, I have been designed for something much bigger than that.

Much bigger.

My sisters? They may look innocent, but they know secrets.

School tells them secrets. When you get to college the

secrets are bigger (that's why they left home).

They can't be trusted anymore.

Eating dinner with the family? Forget about it.

It's all poison. Every last bite. I don't really know why, but I'm

sure that it has something to do with my money.

Maybe the smoking isn't even as bad as I've been told.

The government is always lying.

Probably makes me even smarter.

The Forbidden Tree of Knowledge type of deal.

How am I supposed to convince you that

I am not trying to poison you

When maybe I am.

My poison is

These expectations for you to

Take a shower

Get off the couch

Be normal

The poison you fill your lungs with

Forces you outside

Even in winter when the only

Warmth is the

Dull throbbing

Bulb of light at the

End of your fingers

*Usually, I get lost in the flickering light of
the cigarette.*

It's the only thing I can focus on.

The meds make the truth go all fuzzy.

If I'm honest with myself, everything gets a little

wishy-washy.
 That's why I do the crazy stuff.
 Flying
 off a motorcycle or the
 jolt of
 crashing into cop cars
 brings me back to what I know.
 Plus, I love the attention.

How can I expect you to
 Stay awake
 And
 Stay in the real world
 When you don't even get to see it
 All you see is the two sides of a screened door
 You're a nobody here

*I don't really care if the crazy stuff kills me.
 With all the chemicals coursing through my
 veins, I'm already half dead anyway. Maybe
 I'd even get to go to heaven. Chillin' with Jesus and
 finally getting to be
 normal
 doesn't sound too bad.*

Worse than a nobody
 You're scary

Meditation on Anne Bradstreet

By Leslie Brondsema, History

*Oh how I long to be at rest,
And soar on high among the blest.*

I'll take the pleasure with the pain,
For here on earth they are the same.
Suffering and passion, a paradox sure,
But tell me you have felt the lure.
Roll the die or cast the card,
Remember to stay on your guard.
You'll never want to risk too much.
Insanity comes the like and such.
Why do we stay in a world not sane,
When we could walk a heavenly lane?
Tick, tock, the clock goes on,
Stand your ground, you'll soon be gone.

Dear Other

By Trevor Delamater, Writing and Rhetoric & Business

Allow me this
privilege: to hate you—for centipedes
to trickle
up my spine
when I hear your name's syllables
glumping
in my stomach like
boulders falling

on sand. Teach your
name to lose
your face, for your
hands to turn to talons
and your skin to
snaky scales, sliming
with repulsion:
Laugh at my scars and keep them
storyless cairns, sinking
me into a
time when you

didn't have
a heart, when no one called you "my
baby, my child, my
lover, my
friend." The hemorrhage
inside me, killing me for
company—give me
my wergild when you were a
dragon. Lancing
your flesh without regret, a cooing

death-
blow, I wouldn't
have faltered when I
saw the holy ocean rise
inside your irises
—and loved.

Of All the Things to Miss

By Liz Meier, English Teaching

I miss singing. Not
with my soprano-pitched
voice but with the
brassy
curly-cued
french horn
I used to play.
Mellow tones golden
like thick honey,
mezzo harmonies sweet,
not shrill.

I miss solving
the complicated equation:
the fingers, lips, tongues, lungs
of thirty instrumentalists.
The puzzle—balance,
intonation, phrasing, rhythm—all
constantly reevaluated
measure by measure
note by
note.

I miss the short hand of the clock
trudging along its well-worn trail
from the 1

to the 2

each hour-long rehearsal, but
the second hand racing
only three or four laps around
the clock face for mere minutes
of performance.

I miss tiptoeing on notes
each measure a trail of footprints: round
black traces on snow-white sheet music—clouds
floating above the five-line domain
that dictates what I play:
the intricate dance steps of Ticheli,
the pounding off-beats of a Sousa march.

I miss the breathy silence
 following the final note,
 as the baton drifts down to our
 director's right side
 and the audience waits
 to thunder their approval.
 Of all the things to miss,
 it's that void lasting
 only a moment, but singing
 just as loud.

Paradise is Losing Orbit

By Olive Leon, Theatre

Do not follow me this time.
I know what you did in order
to stay by my side,
and I know that I don't know
what it would take to stay by yours.
Why do you always say
we could have helped ourselves,
as if our hands and arms
are strong enough to exert
some control over this tired turf?
When the last day comes,
and we've spent our final dollars
on fine wine and cold clear interviews,
will you still see my face
as a plane full of puzzle-piece texture
and colors like the first sunrise?
Or will we know all too well
that the wine we drink is wind on the water,
gusting toward inevitable horizons
and an eventual plunge down the ledge?

I spent several hours in yesterdays,
today commencing a seeking and a knowing,
full of fear and sinking eyes on the brim of my glass.
And I recalled just briefly and quietly
how you stepped between my feet
with a purpose alien to my own,
and shot the sky full of liquid heat
followed by cool and calming rain at the last.
Together we braided our hairs into the tapestries
that carpet those old halls where you sang
and I kissed you because
you told me your name.
When I trace the threads standing in relief,
they weep under my finger tips
for what they have known to be true,
true and false, one and the same, forever.

Now as the sounds approach me
and you disintegrate between dusty pages,

I bid you farewell in stages,
 unable to make my choices consummate.
 We can no longer linger near home,
 where they grew our bones in tiny tubes
 and flushed us full of surrogates.
 I would give you my hand,
 because you've waited so long,
 only to be baited into anorexic decline.
 Do not follow me this time.

Press on

By Leslie Brondsema, History

Reality is missing pieces
Existence dims and fades.

Time has been cast

The Ace of Spades.

Discern how easy

Going down may be.

Caving to pressure

With nary a plea.

But a rising rebellion

Hope is not gone

And through the havoc

Individuals press on.

A battalion commanded

Stand firm in the fight.

With friends beside

And spread the light.

Binding Skin

By Mallory Bjork, English Teaching

my skin, the cover of my soul's pages, is soft
 leather binding, knitted together
 by the Expert Craftsman,
 protecting secrets from
 salty tear streaks
 and perspiration,
 aggressive sunbeams
 and biting winds,
 prodding noses
 and heartbreak

only I have flipped through these pages,
 except him,
 the one my soul opened for,
 letting him examine the rawness
 of emotion inside me,
 deciphering the smudged script
 written by my shaky left hand

his revisions were subtle, at first
 just the change of a verb or two,
 until he found the heart of
 my story, tucked deep within
 the meaty pages of my flesh,
 and with the flip of a page,
 the plot twisted, as he unexpectedly
 ripped pages from my spine,
 erasers burned and lead poisoned
 as he edited me out of my own story,
 penciling in his version of me

I slammed shut,
 preventing his destructive hands
 from tearing more holes in
 my story,

and now

 I'm alone,
 in the painful process
 of revising myself,

Poetry

pen in hand as I dip into
the blood of the wounds he left me,
writing over the scars, a tear in my heart,
desperately trying to make
what once was beautiful,
beautiful again

my soul may never open
for another, but I will find comfort
in this skin that binds me,
the cover strengthening with time,
until when I'm old,
and gravity pleats this leather casing me,
ink fading with my memory as
the binding gives way,
letting loose all my secrets to
mending hands comforting my
mangled body on crisp white sheets,
as my last page is filled,
my final sentence written,
only to be followed by
a heavenly epilogue,
written by the Author of Life,
in a celestial script of liquid gold,
on crisp white pages,
in a new skin that forever
binds me to Him.



Buffalo

By Emily Wallace, Graphic Design

I am Dust

By Mallory Bjork, English Teaching

Blindly, I grab the hammer
and swing, colliding with
my foundation,
each day,
little by little,
another part of me
smashed into oblivion

"I'm finding myself," I say,
"chipping away at imperfections,"
but you don't see that,
you see your precious daughter
and perfect sister changing
for a boy you've only heard of,
"Who are you?" you cry out in fear,
unfazed, I coldly say,
"I'm me"

I shrug off the worried tears
of you, my mother,
as one morning
with damp eyes and trembling lips
you tell me you couldn't sleep,
overwrought with worry and
the Holy Spirit's hold on your heart,
"I think you're changing for him,"
you say and,
I lie and promise,
"I'm not"

Then I sleep in his bed
and question the purpose of
the rose gold promise wrapped
around my finger,
a gift from you

I question everything.

And everything written in stone
becomes the opinion of

some narrow-minded Jesus-freak
 that I despise so I decide to
 carve new truths,
 but my foundation cannot
 withstand the brutal
 pounding of my hammer
 and all at once,
 it crashes down,
 surrounding me in a fog of dust,
 but I just stand there

I don't realize I just destroyed
 who I knew myself to be,
 but somehow,
 from sixty-seven miles away,
 you know,
 so I stand on the curb,
 silently holding the phone
 to my ear,
 oblivious to the pain I've caused,
 and hear my little sister's
 first use of the word,
 "Fuck"
 as her voice shakes with
 rage

The dust of me hangs in the air
 like the tension we feel, and
 I stick out my arm
 as who I used to be lands in my hands,
 my shaking, dust covered hands

Shame
 guilt
 and
 pain
 run to me like old friends
 as I sit under the tree
 a day later
 and call you,
 the same tree I've been going to
 for the "how was your week"
 conversations we always have

My shoulders shake uncontrollably

Poetry

as apologies burst to come out,
you listen to my crackling voice,
sniffs and pauses between mumbled words
so I can breathe,
just enough to say the words
"I'm sorry" and
"I love you"

I can't see you,
but I know your arms are open,
and through the phone
I gladly take them

I look at the dust of me
that finally settled on the ground,
overwhelmed by the debris,
I wonder how I can ever
be me again

You tell me I can start anew,
for He himself took dust from the ground
giving it new life by forming us with his hands

His beautiful, dust covered hands

Love Patronus

By Mallory Bjork, English Teaching

I was four when you
first became sad.
Mom says that's why you
came to live with us.

The doctors call it depression.
I call it dementors.

They hovered over you as
you struggled through college,
oblivious to their existence,
an evil presence casting
a dark shadow over your personality
like the black cloaks
they wear.

Everywhere you went,
dementors followed,
a trail of frost biting
your heels, their breath
a chill in the air,
keeping you in sweaters
on the warmest of days.

For an eternity, they lingered,
gradually darkening your mood.
But their attack was sudden,
dementors circling you from the sky above,
their hunger for you ravenous
as a wolf in winter, dragging you down to
the cold concrete where they tried to kiss you,
sucking your happiest memories away,
leaving you numb,
without purpose,
even the most vibrant colors
froze into lifeless grays.

If I could,
I would use the time-turner keychain

Poetry

you gave me from Harry Potter World
and go back to that day
and maybe the words "Expecto Patronum"
could penetrate the darkness
and protect you from those monsters.

But the time-turner was only a keychain
and it broke, and the past
is as permanent
as my love for you,
so there's no going back,
only forward.

So instead of
"Expecto Patronum"
we will chant prayers
as we join hands
and surround you as a family,
for I feel as if our prayers create
a powerful force, a love patronus.
And when I close my eyes
I see your Guardian
stalking out into the night,
a Lion shielding His daughter,
His roar sending trembles
to the earth's dark core.

That's how I imagine prayers—
old magic deeper than dementors, than
depression. But I know you still feel
that cold, despairing grayness—
a wraith haunting your thoughts,
dementors lurking, but, I pray, keeping
their distance, afraid of the roaring in our prayers.

Distinctive Styles Are Only Praised When Good

By Alice Church, Sociology

Do you want me to write for you?

Do you want me to write for you?

Do you want sonnets composed

poems scrawled

harsh words

scattered across a page?

Do you want all of these things to be

yours, and yours alone

formed by a head filled purely

(not purely filled)

with thoughts of you?

I can't give you these things

I don't have the mouth for the kind of poetry you want

the kind of poetry anyone would want

My poetry is pretentious amateurism

a forceful (not forced) vomit that

comes out through fingertips and

masquerades itself as

fully formed and functional (if flawed) phrasing

but loss of this pretention leads to loss of passion and

without passion

my words are all too visible as

the vomit they are

formed of and

no one wants vomit composed for them

no one wants a mass of puke scrawled across the floor in their honor

no one wants harsh regurgitation in any context

Going to the Sun Road

By Amie Adams, Writing and Rhetoric

"I feel that nothing can befall me in life, — no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

At the top of the mountain pass I gape
wide-eyed at the towering Rockies
like the Midwestern girl I am—
it's not just the altitude
that's breath-taking up here.

The naked peaks draped
in white sheets dwarf
the pines huddling down
in the lush valley below and
pencil-streak waterfalls gleam
like shiny ribbons rivering the rocky cliffs.

Brilliant sunlight crashes down and
two miniature clouds hang
—suspended—
in the blue air above the high
ridgeline, a lone cone
punctures the blue.

Captivated by the majesty of this place,
the texture and depth of the landscape,
I sit on a large sunbaked boulder
on the side of the road, breathe
in the thin pine air,
and simply
stare.

I daydream about scooting
down the rocky ledge and descending
into the wild landscape to saunter
through clustered pines or drench
myself in a waterfall's glacial shower.

The mountains stretch
my imagination—far as they are tall.

I picture myself alone on the summit of that far-off cone;
it doesn't seem so far way until I attempt
to gauge its size—first comparing the trees
to the valley walls, then the walls
to the mountains, and I realize it's futile;
it's enormous.

My eyes, so accustomed to fields of crops
s t r e t c h i n g
out until they meet the horizon,
are confounded by the enormity
of this landscape that

envelopes my body and
frees my soul.

Behind the Curtain

By Nicole Montgomery, English Teaching

The stage opens
its velveteen curtains
revealing the
half-dressed, hidden
secrets
of my heart.

I am an actress
in rags
my costume—all but gone.
red-faced behind
this ripped mask.

In the spotlight, I begin
to unveil the pain
bottled in me like
volcanoes, on the verge of
eruption.
Repressed memories
of suicide attempts, so
long ago buried
claw through my chest—
a monster
wedged inside the
confines of my ribcage.

My heart burns red
upon my sleeve, smudged
lipstick ruby-red
while I imagine roses
that same crimson
scattered on the stage
all for me.

Critics see my costume
in tatters—not
my pirouette—and
hurl tomatoes, rotting.
They are eager to
pick apart all

purpose: driven to
jar me
back to reality.

The curtain closes
on my hot thoughts
consuming my soul
as I scrape the
scabs of
tomato skins from
my arms.
Another criticism,
another failure,
the searing
of vulnerability's venom
coursing through me,
wounding,
always
wounding.

but my bravest that seeps from my fingertips
lefts wiped on the worn denim of my jeans

the light's above stare me down
in a flickering disapproval
(or is it my mind that flickers?)

the leech at the tip of my spine
sinks and
winks my neck

in dizzying circles
as those with marble vocal chords
spin around me, collecting words
from the watering hole

where the plant variety "interesting response" is grown
while a drop of lukewarm coffee
sooths its dregs of chemical sugar
opens its watery eyes from the bottom of my cup
(it has no answers to this test)

the four expectant faces gaze with wide mouths
all away to the side, as I have
in my torso in this electric chair
but my mouth is still crafting an answer
in the form of teeth against my tender cheek

When I Feel Beautiful

By Carissa Tavary, English Teaching

Every so often...

I catch a glimpse of a face,

Of whom I am nearly unbeknownst,
And on which words,

so seldom spoken

Are written in her eyes...

In a speech I begin
to reveal the truth
hidden in my life
when one, on the verge of
departure
has tried to mention
of such attempts, so
long ago buried
down through my chest—
a memory
wedged inside the
confines of my ribcage.

My heart burns red
upon my sleeve, unadged
brilliant ruby-red
while I imagine what
that same crimson
would look on the stage
all for me.

Critics see my costume
in father's suit
my presence—and
their laughter, cutting
They sit eager to
pick apart all

The Womb's Wishbone

By Victoria Horn, Writing and Rhetoric & Literature

"you're basically the same person, right?"

the stuffy world is suddenly filled
with the screech of laughter
and a cacophony of cheap forks scraped
across the bottom of a plastic bowl
my ears burn hot like the handle of a skillet
under the fluorescent glare
of my challenger's eyes
and my palms flex

wide

as if to catch the anger that rises up like bile
and burns the back of my tongue

but any bravery that seeps from my fingerprints
gets wiped on the worn denim of my jeans

the lights above stare me down
in a flickering disapproval
(or is it my mind that flickers?)

the leash at the tip of my spine
whirs and
yanks my neck
in dizzying circles
as those with nimble vocal chords
run around me, collecting words
from the watering hole
where the plant variety "*interesting responses*" is grown
while a drop of lukewarm coffee
with its dregs of chemical sugar
opens its watery eyes from the bottom of my cup
(it has no answers to this test)

the four expectant faces gape with wide mouths
and sway to the sickening dance
of my torso in this electric chair
but my mouth is still crafting an answer
in the form of teeth against my tender cheek

Poetry

my tongue sucks the salty iron-rich wound
in a sadistic longing
to taste the blood that once flowed
gently
between the two umbilical cords
that my attackers now mock
and whip around like flogging ropes,
my face now a frozen, clay chimera
grimacing up from the bottom
of an empty womb
and my fingers twist a slippery lanyard
around in a menacing parody
of the red string between my pinky
and that of my womb buddy—
the mournful wishbone
that will birth two small halves
I could present to them
in my sweaty palm

Schrodinger's Rose

By Victoria Horn, Writing and Rhetoric & Literature

"so here's the thing (my lovely) –
the world has grown a different set of arms
since my departure in the blue winter
of sophomoric discontent
and I feel their pull with my new torso,
grown from spontaneous soliloquies
inside a warm, brown office
and the changing leaves outside,
beckoning me
to look up and appreciate their

something new blooms even now
somewhere below
and I'm uncertain of how
your flowers will fit inside my garden
after four seasons of distant growth

the wick waits for us
underneath
but the dead trees that once were have
woken up
and I can't help feeling their magnetic

to burrow down in between their boughs
and let them build new trundle beds
and cocoon-shaped homes

so our garden of two-person solitude
is going to blossom in one big breath—
a lung
expanding
to fill the holes
where oxygen has been missing
but just because my roots curl
around the sturdy trunks of other palms
does not mean our roots will stop adding
to the hive of good things we have created together” —
I say this to her,
plant a rose in our own secret garden

fall

pull

meant only for me

meant only for her
 and watch the pink blooms rush to the surface
 unfolding—
 slowly, gently,
 in the deep brown soil of her pupils,
 the veiny roots shooting through her irises
 to hold my love there
 an oxymoron of stillness & flight
 and I can feel all of my roots

stretch
 from the lavender tip
 of my spine,
 to the spring green skin
 of my toes

and all throughout the unwinding
 of the knot in my stomach,
 I can feel the buttery slick of sunlight
 spreading over my dry, depleted soil—
 enough to lend a friend
 who must learn to grow both alongside

and apart
 and she shoots up, a little green hopper
 born beneath the brown grass

but away from the ivy-covered walls
 that house my rosy glasses,
 the ground is frozen,
 no spurt of understanding,
 that little green hopper
 buried alive
 by an avalanche
 of boulders

that I had merely

pricked
 before the wailing whirl of tears
 tumbling down fast
 the seed in my hand forgotten
 with the clammy clench of my fists
 against the hard, dead chair beneath me

the rose I had tended so lovingly
 (in my dreams)

now grows like a tumor,
 her ragged breath

feeding
the horrendous Venus Fear-Trap
that grows in my tangled bush

of words

Boys

By Alice Church, Sociology

There will be boys there! A sentence half-yelled as you walk past my door
Further down the hall, even more excitement expressed
Boys? Boys were here? A cluster gathers, a fucking flock of adolescents who
believe they are scientists on the brink of a Great Discovery
What is this oh-so-foreign creature?
This brand-new creation only very recently pulled from the dust we trample
Let's talk about boys! For what else could hold so much wonder, so much unknown beauty?
Such a great deal of excitement, the pure unbridled excitement of chaste Christian girls
If the concept fascinates you so, pick up a book
Read a fucking article
On the societal constructs that are gender roles
If that's not what you're interested in, then one has to wonder
Why Good Christian Girls are so concerned about other people
Purely because those other people
Have penises

Haikus from a mending soul

By Abby Bliss, Theatre

Your eyes tell stories
Stained glass windows to your soul
Don't shut them. I see.

You can't tread water
And hold the weight of the world
The weight is not yours.

Have courage, dear soul.
Long nights don't last. New days come.
Breathe in. Start again.

You are not enough
The cruel world says to me.
Why do you listen?



Lil' Critter

By Michelle Simpson, Translation/Interpretation and Spanish

Linæ en'Rusva Mela (Lake of Broken Love)

By Kaleyanisa Davila, Art

Softly sweeps o'er the mountain
The tune, the sweet lullaby.
Swallows sing with excitement.
The willow trees whisper their cries.

At the lake, at the lake, will we not meet?
The glow will keep our love.
At the lake, at the lake, my love so sweet.
Trapped by heaven above.

Salt, which floods o'er the valley.
The blue, the lake of mine eye.
White wolves howl, oh, so sadly.
The crooked trees echo their lies.

At the lake, at the lake, will we not meet?
The glow will keep our love.
At the lake, at the lake, my love trapped me
With powers from up above.

I wait, at the lake, to be set free.
From Linæ en' Rusva Mela.

Butterfly Hollow

By Kali Wolkow, Journalism & Graphic Design

It was my own Neverland.
A place where parents and expectations were banned.
In an alcove of forgotten dirt tracks and spindly trees
Its musty morning breath whispered through their leaves:

Be still, my lamb. Slow down, drink me up, replenish your soul.
Remember you're but a child and are bound to no other role.
Float like the butterflies through this hollow.
Channel your inner Tinker Bell, don't settle to become an ordinary swallow.
You can be more than you think and do more than you dream.
Sometimes it just means that you'll have to paddle upstream.

The Monarchs would tell you that life is meant to be embraced,
That it's a gift that is given and not one to be wasted in haste.
It's a fluttering mass of opportunities, experiences, and great surprise,
It's a world for the taking, but one where we should appreciate each sunrise.

Find your favorite rotting old stump,
The one with its own mushroom farm and hunchback hump.
Look at it for the beauty that you see it to be,
Then look at yourself and love your inner me.

Watch the bugs and the beetles and the ants leaving their trail
Like transient stitches in Mother Nature's shirttail.
Life is moving, and its time ticks on the Master grandfather clock.
But don't be afraid, time is your friend, not an impenetrable roadblock.

Close your eyes, hear the birds twitter their song.
Relax your shoulders; don't worry about staying too long.
My branches will support you; my foliage will provide you shade.
My calm will comfort you when emotions against your heart again raid.

Peter Pan had his tree house; you have your nook in the tree line by Page's field.
The oldest son saw you once, but you know his lips are sealed.
This weathered old windbreak that creates a boundary for your farm
Is also your ticket to freedom, your safe and secret place to escape life's harm.

Summer will fade, and seasons will pass you by.
But always remember that for brief moments you believed you could fly.

Formality and Princesses

By Jen Te Grotenhuis, Social Work

I ask the little Jamaican girl if I'm hurting
her, and she laughs at me
because her *madda* pulls cane rows tighter
than I ever could.

Coarse, dark hair snarls
as our white fingers weave it ineptly
over and under
over and under,
tugging and yanking.

Our mouths leak apologies like the sweat dripping
down our foreheads in the Jamaican humidity,
but they are instantly brushed away with a firm
"Hush yuh mouth!"

Then one fair skinned Iowan remarks,
"You girls look just like princesses!"
All the girls with "clear" speech
or blonde hair
or blue eyes
nod emphatically in support,
never once pausing to consider a princess that looks
like these coffee-skinned beauties.

A sassy Jamaican second grader turns
and looks at us harshly, says, "*Oh, no, Miss.*
Wi a nah princesse.
Princesses a white
like yuh."

The rest of the braided-hair beauties giggle behind hands
because this fact, to them, is written in cement blocks
that have been chained to their ankles their whole lives.
And our fair faces turn crimson,
mouths hanging open, our ignorance
suddenly obvious on our raised eyebrows.
But our polite Midwestern selves need to fix this,
because where we're from we don't look at things that are broken and now we
are
uncomfortable.

Heaven forbid we unveil our protected eyes to see pain
as hot as this tropical sun.

Pain that has long since been a part of the daily lives of so many
and pain that we and others like us have
been trained not to see.

So we grapple for arguments that will make the girls see
that they are wrong,
mistaken in believing that they cannot be
anything they want to be,
exactly what they say we are.

But the iron-willed, mocha-skinned 2nd grader
crosses her arms
and she will not budge.

And it dawns on me that maybe this girl knows
what she's talking about.

Now it seems to me that my mouth is spewing nonsense,
gibberish,
and I slowly close it,
forcing the rush of meaningless junk to cease because,
really,
to tell them that they have no limitations is just
a formality.

In the world these girls live in
happy endings do not exist
for them.

And the white tourists their parents serve every day
at their cruise stops have never seen
these girls' homes—don't know
about the orphans high up in the Blue Mountains
or how the government stops paving the jungle roads
at the last tourist trap.

I had always thought knowing these things meant
I wasn't blind.

But now my eyes are uncovered
and my fear of discomfort is made quickly irrelevant.

Because these girls know very well the privilege that I have
and they're challenging me to throw my Christian pride out the window
and own it.

And the little girl turns to face me
 when I finish braiding,
 gripping my heart with her eyes,
 telling me,
 Please.
 Don't forget.

2:47 a.m.

By Brianna Mullaney, English Teaching

She's locked in her bathroom—
distracted.
Her emotions and wrists
are raw, torn
by anxiety's dull blade
and depression's razor.
She has no strength to gather,
the shattered pieces of her life.
Mirror shards reflect her: lying
on the cold floor that is unforgiving—
much like the kids who forced
her to change schools and churches.

She had long since lost all hope in God.
Or, at least the God she had known.
That God wouldn't have let
this
happen to her.
He wouldn't have let her parents treat
her like trash or litter
bruises on her body.
Blades would not have caressed her stomach; nor
flames have puckered her soft skin into a
pink.
If God was real, she wouldn't be
impossibly alone.

"Where are you then?
Why don't you help me?"
A broken cry echoes in the silence as
a razor digs deeper into her marred skin,
convincing her she'd never really known love.

Impatiently, she waits
and listens
and hears nothing.

She clutches the knife again before she hears it—

His voice.

"Child,"

peace floods through her enflamed body.

"Fear not, for I am with you.

I am as close to you as

your marred skin.

I will strengthen you, help

you, and uphold you.

You are not alone."

—anyone saved but you and I
—and I will save it.

—and I will take a bird's eye
—and I will take a bird's eye

—and I will take a bird's eye
—and I will take a bird's eye

—and I will take a bird's eye
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—and I will take a bird's eye
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Life is a Beautiful Fight

By Brianna Mullaney, English Teaching

"This might sting a little," the tattoo artist said.

"Let me know if you need a break."

The needle pricked
my scarred skin,
injecting the words
into my arm.

Tatted and pierced, the artist's
own body was a canvas in which his face was framed
by knitted eyebrows and a quizzical look
when I handed him my sketch.

"Life is a beautiful fight?" he asked.

I nodded with a tight smile.

Life was beautiful.
Sunrises and sunsets,
stargazing and drive-in movies,
softball games and road trips,
Ed Sheeran concerts and kisses—
my pulse racing in moments that demanded appreciation.
My heart, bursting.

But life was a fight too.
Anxiety and depression,
loss and loneliness, sleepless
nights and scars, terrible pain
and a suicide attempt.

Intense moments in which breathing
seemed a great accomplishment and
the will to live was hard to find.
Moments in which my chest was caved
in and I cried,
"I don't want to feel anymore!"

But I feel the tattoo artist inking my arm with
three birds that nest on my bicep.

Three—a fourth is needed ... now.
 I'll need a touch up to add another friend.
 I can name each one: loved ones
 flying high and free,
 but never forgotten;
 permanent in my life
 and on my skin.

Under the 'h' in 'fight,'
 an equal sign to show that
 love is love. God loves everyone—
 that's how I see it.

I see a bird take flight, my friend,
 homosexual and without hope—hated, he thought,
 by God's children. He forgot
 the Father always
 loved him.

He forgot I loved him.

The cross hurt the most.
 Little lines, back and forth,
 cutting into my skin,
 drawing blood.

Later,
 it would become infected.
 Blood dripped from it, reminding
 me not of my pain but the suffering of
 Christ. Thinking, *Life is beautiful, and*
faith has its trials.

The artist stops the needle and stares into my eyes.
 My heart races and I wonder if he
 messed up.

"Do you want your 'i's dotted?" he asks as he points
 to the sketch. I laugh, relieved.
 "The 'i' in beautiful, you mean?"
 He nods and I explain that,

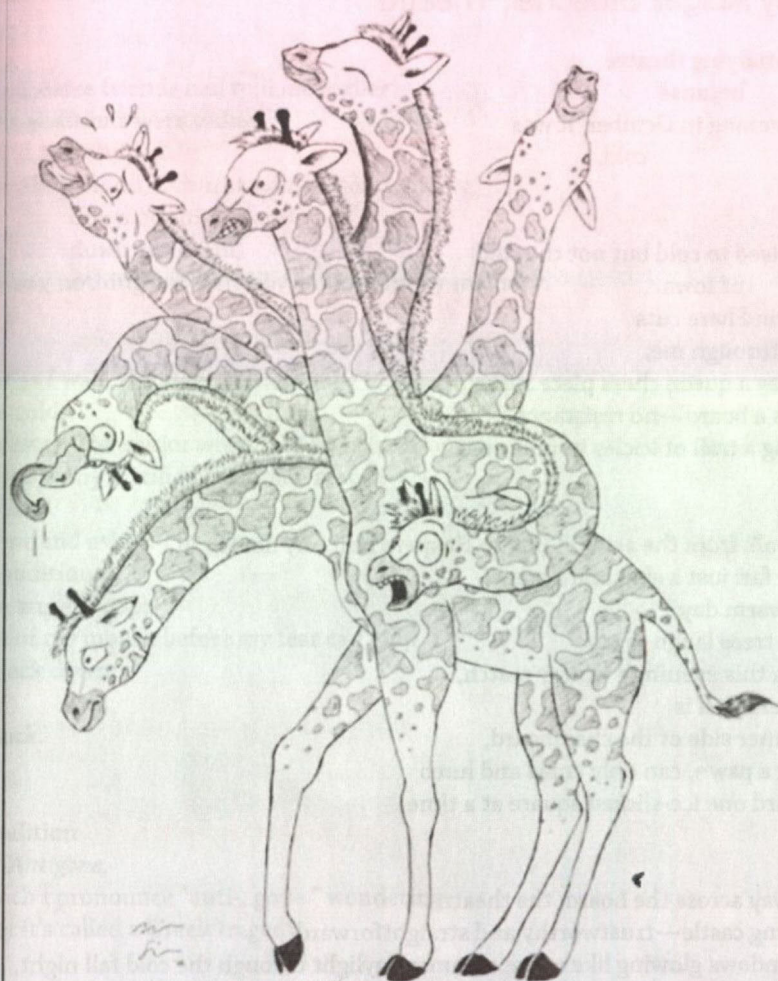
"It's supposed to be a semicolon,
 not an 'i'—It needs to stick out.

Because a semicolon is used
to mark where a
sentence could've
stopped, but
continued.

My life could've
stopped; but
didn't."

"I get it," he said, smiling and
squinting to finish:

life is a beaut;ful fight.



Hydra Giraffe

By Michelle Simpson, Translation/Interpretation and Spanish

Checkmate

By Abigail Stoscher, Theatre

I am studying theatre
because
one evening in October, it was
cold.

I am used to cold but not the cold
of Iowa.
The wind here cuts
right through me,
the way a queen chess piece slices
across a board—no resistance—
leaving a trail of icicles in my bones.

The walk from the art building to Hospers Hall (my dorm),
is not far: just a skip and a step—
on a warm day,
when trees laugh green.
But in this evening's wintry match,
Hospers Hall is
the other side of the chessboard,
and I, a pawn, can only crawl and lurch
forward one ice-slicked square at a time.

Halfway across the board, the theatre,
a strong castle—trustworthy and straightforward,
its windows glowing like warm summer daylight through the cold fall night,
catches
my shelter-seeking eyes. It lights
up the world like the lamppost
in Narnia's snowy wood.
An escape from the icy queen.

Why not? I reason. There's no rush.

I stop.

I grasp

the metal handle – cold as the air that stings my face.

I yank

the door

open.

I slipped inside the warm theatre, unaware
that the chess pieces had me where they wanted me, were ready
to capture me.

My theatre friends had told me earlier
that auditions were today,
but it had slipped
out of my mind, a thin stream of paint gliding
down out of its can,
down the drain,
leaving nothing but a grubby smudge in my memory.

But as I walk through the door now to escape
the cold,
Christa—the senior who gives hugs (a wonder
to me in my terrified freshman state)—
steps
to me and asks if I'm here
to audition.

The answer pops
out of my mouth before my fear can gulp
it back down:

Yes.

Check.

I audition
for *Antigone*,
which I pronounce “anti-, gone,” wondering
why it’s called a Greek tragedy.

I hope it’s actually in English.

The next day, I skitter
to the theatre, a knight moving in jittery L-shapes, wanting
both to see and to not see
the theatre call board, where
my future is printed
on a crisp sheet in even, black letters, tacked
up with a yellow pin:

CAST LIST.

And under that blocked heading, I read

Poetry

(with a thrill that shoots
down through my whole body):

Abigail Stoscher.

Checkmate.

That was all it took
for me to realize how I relish
 finding my way through the complex tunnels of a character's mind—
slathering
 the stage (and myself) in paint, breathing in colors rich as rain-scented
air—swinging
 through high metal mazes to nudge lights into place—
 (hearing them *click*
 into position, a key unlocking
 a stubborn door)
and pouring myself into designs, sketch by sketch capturing
 my fleeting ideas: grabbing clouds out of the sky and spreading
them out flat
 on paper for others to see.

That was all it took: one cold
evening, (an icy queen) and one warm
theatre (a lit castle)
to capture me. And in the brilliant style
of a Master Chess-Player,
I found myself
 checkmated
into studying theatre.

Safe

By Abigail Stoscher, Theatre

My cherry tree is a young mother
with white ribbons in her hair.
From behind my house, she beckons,
arms waving, stretching, the way a mother coaxes
her toddler to walk to her.
My schoolbag flies off my back,
a baseball spinning off the fingers of a star pitcher, dragging
the day's troubles down with it: the cramped
hours at a desk with people staring, laughing, because
I am American.
I am different.
The baggag hits the front porch stairs with a solid
thunk!

I leap,
sneakers propelling
me off the grass, gravity
for an instant

suspended.

Her lowest branch smacks into my palm
like a perfectly caught baseball.

I swing up
through the gnarls of my tree's skirts to
her hand – five branches stretching
like fingers out from a center. I curl up
in her palm, an infant in her mother's arms. My body melts
into the wood,
my safe haven.
Above my head, the white spring ribbons lace
through the leaves. They are the strings
on the front of her medieval dress.
She laughs, her hair shaking
in the wind, sending petals soft as snowflakes fluttering
around my face:
a soft kiss.

Poetry

I am content now,
and open my book –
like a child opens a bag of candy –
to guzzle story
as I did from my real mother's lap
when my brain was too small to fit letters.
My brain now has grown enough that I can make the letters swell
big and round, infused
with dragons and pirates and hobbits.
As I slip into the book,
time – ever chasing
me: the pitcher winding up to throw
me out as I steal home –
freezes,
his arm still up, muscles tensed, ball clenched.
Time is still.
And I am safe.

They cannot touch me here.

That was all it took, one cold
evening, (an icy gust) and one
thrust (a lightning bolt)
to capture me. And in the brilliant
of a Master Chess-Player,
I found myself

chained
to the game.

Fiction

First Place -

Olive Leon

"Skeletal, It Seduces"

Honorable Mention -

Rowan Sullivan

"Florence"

First Place

Judge's Notes:

In fiction we look for a character with a believable, compelling internal tension. The protagonist of this story—Martha—is wrestling with her own compulsive need to track what she eats. Her internal tension is brought into the foreground and highlighted by the actions of a praying mantis, which eats voraciously next to her, eventually snarfing down a dreamy mayfly. The unexpected response of the protagonist to this insect's gluttony brings the story to a crashing close while at the same time leaving one to ponder, yet another good sign that the story is actually working.

Skeletal, It Seduces

By Olive Leon, Theatre

"Two-ten. Plus three-fifty makes... oh, no."

A praying mantis edged one claw against the window of Martha McCauley's bedroom. As he gingerly tested the outlying glass frontier, his grip slipped and he tumbled head-first onto the window sill. There lay an injured moth; the mantis poked at its wings once before sinking his jaws into the quivering body.

"Five hundred and sixty." Martha let her head fall onto her desk sideways so she could see the mantis at his meal. How many vegetables figured into that number? "One-twenty, give or take." She subtracted this number from the larger sum, subtracted another hundred for orange juice, and totaled the results. "Three hundred and forty."

A green blur in her peripheral vision, the mantis finished his meal and ambled out of sight. All that remained of the moth was a pair of wispy antennae, branched like ferns.

Martha tore the sheet from her scribble pad and crumpled it in one fist. I can do better, she thought to herself.

Although the sun beat through the roof and warmed her apartment, Martha felt inexplicably cold. She was very conscious of, and grateful for, the

goosebumps on her arms and legs. She took a calculated three sips of ice water from a tumbler on her desk and watched as the goosebumps swelled and her arm hairs rose like soldiers in formation. Three hundred and forty – three-hundred and forty – the numbers swirled in her head for a bit before she remembered what they stood for. Three hundred and forty wasn't all that bad, but she could do better for dinner. Perhaps two hundred, or two hundred and twenty.

Time passed in metered circles for Martha McCauley. She had dropped out of college after failing algebra; now, she knew numbers intimately. Like old friends, they smiled on her achievements and scolded her for her shortcomings. There was nothing Martha did that the numbers did not know. So she clocked her hours tightly, because time was built of numbers, and numbers were her food. An hour after lunch, she felt nearly full; two hours, and she felt fuller than before. Three hours, and she began to measure the minutes until supper.

The numbers made a jealous spouse. Occasionally Martha strayed into infidelity, like the time Ozzie had invited her to the Louvre for an unveiling of new art pieces. Martha had found the event boring and wandered to distant walls of the museum. There she met Napoleon Bonaparte's lover, Josephine, reclining on what looked like a stack of rocks. At the time, Martha had only felt sympathy for the woman that the artist would pose her against such a harsh backdrop. Josephine looked soft and delicate, so the juxtaposition with her surroundings was effective but unnecessary in Martha's eyes. Later, however, as she drove back to her hotel, Martha remembered Josephine's expression of utter contentment, free from discomfort. The woman had seemed serene – more than serene, she had seemed fulfilled.

Martha threw her crumpled scratch paper into the wastebasket. 'Fulfilled' always felt strange on her brain. The cadence of it felt like overcompensating after speeding around a hard bend. There was no room for numbers in fulfillment. Numbers required incompleteness; they went on and on, an endless computer log of hastily corrected mistakes. Fulfillment seemed to Martha to be the absolute opposite of the numbers; where she was concerned, fulfillment could not exist. At least, not in the sense of "Josephine Bonaparte relaxing on rocks with nothing to do and nothing to want" exist. Perhaps fulfillment existed for Martha in the form of a glass full of ice water and a hard morning run. This last thought struck Martha as profound. When she inverted the numbers and made them negative, she felt fulfilled. Martha opened a new sheet on her scribble pad and recorded her discovery with a self-righteous sense of achievement.

The praying mantis reappeared on her window sill in a brittle flutter of wings. Martha wished he would go away, but this time he sat facing into the room. With his front limbs propped stiffly against the glass, he looked like a skinny green dog.

"I have no more moths for you," Martha said to him. "Besides, that was probably your total daily protein intake in one meal. You should watch your figure, you know."

The praying mantis showed no reply except to twitch his head a little to one side. His cockiness was utterly unforgiveable.

"Go away," Martha snapped at him. "Go make babies and get eaten." She aimed her pen at the window and chucked it against the glass. It struck just to the right of the insect with a sharp 'ping' and tumbled onto carpet. The mantis didn't budge.

"Okay," Martha propped her elbows on the desk and rested her forehead against folded hands, as if in prayer. After a few minutes like this, she arose and went into her kitchen.

She desperately wanted to have coffee and a granola bar. Instead, she crossed the marble floor to her fridge and pulled out a half-eaten can of beets. Before digging in, Martha gave the nutrition facts label a cursory glance. She already knew exactly what was in her beets, down to the last gram of sugar. She had even calculated the average amount of calories and carbs in each silky red disc. Her jaw closed on succulence; to ease her guilt, she sipped some ice water. Sixty-five.

She wondered if the ice water counted to subtract any, but doubted it. How many were the beets worth?

Idiot. Sixty-five.

When she returned to her seat, the mantis had strayed to one end of the outer window sill. It was watching the drunk dance of a mayfly a couple inches above its head. Martha was reminded of when she visited her cousin for New Year's Eve. Heads thrown back, necks crooked into hundreds of wrinkles, they had watched the ball drop in Times Square. It had been almost as good as watching television, only much colder.

The mayfly was being too rash, Martha thought. It drifted dizzily past the mantis' nose, but the mantis didn't so much as twitch.

Martha allowed the dance to continue beyond recognition of time. The mantis' limbs, thinner than toothpicks, mesmerized her. The mayfly, too, was mesmerized, but only with its own waltz. What was the mayfly doing? Martha asked herself. Perhaps it could feel mid-air dust particles swishing around its feet. Martha thought she would like that, to be light enough to feel dust particles. It struck her that the mantis could share her thoughts. What if, she pondered, he also wished to be a mayfly? Or maybe he merely admired the mayfly. The mantis and the mayfly, two fragments of material time, one deprived by the dance and the other satiated by mere air.

In a swift sequence, the mayfly's wings brushed against the window sill and sent the pair of moth's antennae puffing off. Martha blinked. Before she refocused, the mantis had the mayfly, a larger skeleton seducing the smaller, susceptible one. For a split second they remained so on the sill, limbs disarrayed into marriage.

"Okay," said Martha. She rose stiffly from her seat at the desk and went to the window. The mantis noticed her now, turning his head to track her movement. The mayfly, two halves bound by a chewed strand of torso, hung from his mouth. Martha unlatched the window and opened the bottom half.

"I saw you," she told the mantis. "I saw you take your time. How could you?" The mantis stared at her, as though he would have replied had he not been eating.

"You couldn't let it be," said Martha. "It was so beautiful and lost, and you knew it. You made it lost before it finished dancing. You can't have everything you see, don't you know?" She sighed and put a finger out toward the mantis. Using one leg to guide the mayfly into his mouth, he looked at her finger without fear.

"Come here," said Martha. "You don't have to make babies and get eaten. I will save you." The mantis let half of the mayfly fall uneaten from his mouth and crept toward her finger.

"That's it," Martha coaxed in a whisper. Sooner than he knew, she had him to the inner ledge of the sill. In a flash, she withdrew her finger and brought the window slamming down upon him, right where his upper torso met the bulbous bullet of his rear. His wings snapped perceptibly, his front legs scabbled against wood. Slowly his sides split and his insides leaked yellow around him.

Martha returned to her desk and pulled out a new sheet of scratch paper. On the outer window sill, a gentle wind picked up a wing from the mayfly and carried it above Chicago traffic into the afternoon.

"Sixty-five, plus two-twenty."

Honorable Mention

Florence

By Rowan Sullivan, Theatre

Florence was standing on the edge of the platform waiting for the train, a black sun umbrella in one hand, a small leather case in the other. Her dark hair blew slightly off her shoulders in a light breeze, hair that matched her darkened eyes and the black lace detailing of her dark scarlet dress. She traced her fingers along a bronze chain that ran from a point on her waist to a small pocket on her front and removed a hunter-style bronze pocket watch with the image of a clock face flanked by two open wings etched expertly into its front. She flipped it open, glanced at it, closed it again, and replaced it without reaction.

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The train that would take her west from this minuscule town in the middle of the Wyoming prairie on the still-new Transcontinental Railroad appeared from the East, the black smoke from its engine darkening the midday sky. In the distance could be heard the sound of its whistle.

Behind Florence, the platform was littered with people all minding their own business. Sitting on a bench next to the ticketing station was a man with a small book, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and a short black top hat. He wasn't doing anything of particular interest, but the way his eyes continued to shift from side to side under the brim of that hat made her uneasy. This had to be the target. She would keep an eye on this one.

Half an hour later, the train pulled up to the station. Florence put down her umbrella, tucked it under one arm, lifted her long red skirt away from her boots, and stepped aboard.

The man with the top hat folded his newspaper and climbed in after her. She turned right towards her compartment and watched as he followed her down the corridor. She made her way along the tiny hallway to her private room, slid back the door, dropped her belongings on one seat, and took the other, facing the front of the train so as to see the world come at her. She

turned back and looked through the window onto the hallway just long enough to see the man walk by. He was moving quickly, eyes down, book tucked neatly under his arm and held there with vice-like pressure.

"Dammit," Florence muttered to herself. "He sticks out like a sore thumb."

Hours later, Florence was just finishing up dinner in the red light of the setting sun when a little boy about two years old began crying on the other end of the dining car. Not being one for children or their screaming, she replaced her knife and fork on her nearly clean plate, got up, and exited the car. The dining car was around the fourth car from the engine, placing her own six cars back.

As she walked towards the rear of the train, she caught snippets of conversation from people seated in smaller seats by the windows. Things like the New York shootings and the gold in California were prominent topics. As she reached the section of cars with private compartments like her own, she stopped hearing conversation and began watching glimpses of lives behind the glass in each door. Some people were asleep, others spoke animatedly, still others were reading or staring out at the darkening sky.

A shout. A scream. A gunshot from the opposite end of the car. Her car. She froze as people began pouring out of their compartments, running out both ends, all more concerned with escape than the precise location of the blast. Florence watched them go, staying as far out of their way as she could in the cramped hallway.

When it was empty, she slowly pulled up her skirts, slid her right hand to her thigh, and extracted a small black revolver from its holster. At the same time, she slid a practiced finger into a small pouch on the side of the holster, extracted a single cartridge, and slid it into the cylinder.

Slowly, she slid down the corridor, checking every windowed door as she drew level with it. She made sure to slowly slide the door to her own open compartment closed as she passed. As she drew near the last door, she took a deep breath, and stepped level, gun outstretched with a finger on the trigger. A man stood there, looking out the door as though waiting for her. Not the man with the shifty eyes and the short top hat, but a man of about 6'2" standing straight and tall in a nearly immaculate grey jacket, white shirt, and black trousers held up with black suspenders. There was a slightly amused grin on his sallow face.

At his feet was the top hat standing in a pool of blood that was seeping from the front of its owner's head.

"A woman is holding a gun on me. Oh, what is this world coming to?" He asked sarcastically. His voice was dark and smooth, like good whiskey, the kind of voice that was too perfect to ever be trusted. He smiled, though his amusement did not reach his crinkled eyes, which remained the blue of frosty winter skies beneath his brown hair.

"Insanity, surely," Florence shot back, rather sarcastically. "Or they sent someone who could actually get a job done."

"You know the deputies will be along any minute."

Florence smirked. She dropped one hand from the gun to the chain of her watch. Without ever taking her eyes from her target, she popped open the hunter-case and pressed down on the stem.

Almost immediately, the world around them slowed to a standstill. Beyond the blackening window, Florence watched the prairie freeze. Samuel's eyes widened for the briefest of moments.

"You're Agency." It was a statement, not a question.

"Who else would be able to track you down in under 48 hours? Samuel." Florence dropped the watch back into place and brought her hand back to the pistol. "The war's over and all the money's in California rock. Did you really think your little game would go unnoticed?"

"So you were in New York," he smirked. His facade had returned as quickly as it had fallen. "Not one of my best moments, but I'll take it."

"You shot and killed 16 people," Florence countered.

"All of whom asked for it."

"Somehow, I just don't buy that."

"Believe what you will, sweetheart." His hand pushed back the right hem of his coat to reveal a white and silver pistol so finely polished that it shone in the lights of the cabin that were flickering into life. He brushed his fingertips almost lovingly along its edges.

"Even think about using that and I put a bullet in your chest."

His smile receded.

"What is it you want?"

"I'm just curious about the man who shot and killed an innocent. I'd like to hear his story."

"Do you really think I would kill an innocent man?" Samuel whimpered, a sarcastic pout in his voice.

"There is nothing I wouldn't believe of you."

He moved towards her. His advances would have caught her off-guard had she still been 18 and untested, but at 26, Florence was not so easily thrown off-course. She ignored him.

"Are you going to tell me why you chased this one, or do I have to create a story for the Agency after I shoot you?"

"Touchy," he smirked at her. He reached out a hand and slid the back of it down her lace-covered arm, barely making contact, allowing his fingers to linger behind, and achieving his goal of raising the hairs there with his touch. His smile widened.

She would not stand for this. Before his hand could leave her arm, she grabbed his wrist in her free left hand and twisted his arm. Caught by surprise, the man was thrown slightly off-balance as he tried to rip her hand away. Seizing her chance, Florence threw herself into him, slamming him back against the glass window inside the compartment. She lost her footing somewhere between the ever-growing pool of blood, the solitary top hat, and the body of the man with the shifty eyes, which had been kicked roughly to the side. As she

slid, she felt her body connect with the stem of her pocket watch, and the world sped back into life.

The glass of the window shattered from the weight of her target. Cold night air ripped its way into the train, turning Florence's hair into a mass of angry dark serpents. The man between her and the wall saw his opening. Reaching out, he took hold of a lock of Florence's free hair, twisted it around his hand, and pulled as hard as he could. Florence screamed as her head was brought down towards the floor, and in the same moment, the man brought his knee into her stomach. She flew backwards and landed in the pool of blood, darkening her already scarlet dress. As she looked up, Samuel smiled again. He was going to take his time.

"You should know something," Florence managed to get out. Between the pain in her torso, the sound of the wind, and the screaming of the train barreling along the tracks, it was hard to make herself heard.

"And what's that, sweetheart?"

"I don't miss."

Florence's dark eyes narrowed as they connected with Samuel's ice blue ones. At the same moment, she brought up her right hand, the hand that had never let go of her gun.

A single shot rang out as the man yelled. He crashed to the floor, Florence's bullet having shattered his kneecap. She rolled onto all fours, grabbed her watch, and froze their world once more. She would not be interrupted by people who did not know what they were dealing with. Those who carried the mark of the Tempus Faction would remain untouched, even if they were a mockery of everything they stood for.

Samuel reached for Florence just as she swung herself out of reach, moving back into the hallway as there was no room left in the compartment with two bodies on the floor.

"You are an insult to we are," Florence said in a steely tone.

Samuel sputtered the words through gritted teeth: "According to you and your precious Agency. I am the saving grace of the order of Tempus. The Family has corrupted everyone." His hand moved back towards his gun. Florence kicked it with the heel of her boot, breaking the skin and adding to his suffering.

"Even if that were true, you have violated our highest laws: Never take the life of another unless necessary to protect the Faction, and never Jump." Florence placed another cartridge in the cylinder and readied the hammer with a resounding click. "Your Jump messed with your sense of reality. No one you've killed has committed the crimes you accused them of."

"They're all guilty!" Samuel spat back. "Every last one of them! The Family has been fooling us all for generations, and it's time somebody stopped them. I was chosen by God to save us from them."

Florence could not help a nagging voice in the back of her mind wondering if it were true, but such voices hardly ever held any merit. At least not in this field. Her dark eyes filled with pity as she stared down at Samuel. Time

could do strange things to a man's mind. His cold eyes pleaded with her as she squeezed the trigger.

Another blast. Samuel's body slumped to the floor. Then, nothing.

The strangest thing about stopped time was the eerie silence it left behind.

She took a few steps back towards Samuel, knelt down, and pushed the right side of his coat away from his body, revealing his pistol. As she removed it from its holster, she noticed the clock face flanked by two open wings that signified his place in their Order. It was her duty, as it was anyone's within the Faction, to remove the crest of any who betrayed them. She then turned and closed the eyes of the man with the short top hat.

As she stood, Florence pressed the stem on her watch one more time. Time resumed, except this time without the screaming. Nothing could be heard except for the train and the wind through the broken window. The near quiet was as deafening as the silence had been.

She looked down at the men at her feet: the man with the top hat and the man with his mind lost to Time. She knew she must look a wreck: hair out of its pins, glass in her skirt, and covered in blood that both did and did not belong to her.

For the first time, she looked around the cabin. On the seat to her left lay the man's copy of *Around the World in 80 Days*. Florence picked it up and leafed through the pages.

"Fitting," she muttered to herself.

Florence returned to her own cabin down the hall, being sure to close the door and shutter the window behind her so no one would see her and come asking questions. A few short minutes later she heard the first scream that meant someone had discovered the bodies.

She sighed. All of this could have been avoided had one imbalanced man not tried to meddle with Time. Stopping and starting it was one thing, but trying to pass through it was another game entirely. No one but the Family's oldest, most learned members were ever trained to travel through Time. It was too dangerous and too addicting.

Still, Samuel's assertion that the Family was up to something continued to occupy her thoughts. It wasn't completely unbelievable. After all, who would ever be able to pin anything to them?

Florence shook herself. Of course it was madness. These thoughts were the last ravings of a dead lunatic who had meddled in things that should never have been meddled in. Being an assassin for the Agency, she'd heard the strangest tales anyone could weave.

The noise outside grew as more people found the mess she had left at the end of the hall. Sixteen dead in New York, two more here, and all because of a madman who had let Time get the best of him. In an attempt to get her mind off of the disturbing implications of Samuel's final words and the horrified noises coming from the corridor beyond, she opened her new book to page one.

"Mr. Phileas Fogg lived, in 1872, at No. 7, Saville Row..."



Daydream

By Lydia Steenhoek, Writing and Rhetoric

Coping with a Loss

By Alyson Eversman, Biology & Writing and Rhetoric

The smell of rain on dry earth always made her think of her escape in the woods. It was the place she went to when she had a stressful day, needed to think, to scream, to cry; and not be heard.

It was her second home, a hard to find spot about a quarter mile away from her real home. It wasn't easy to find either. She had to follow a major overgrown path with just enough stones to make out where the path was leading her, although she didn't need it. She knew every tree, rock, leaf, and animal like it was her own.

A clap of thunder woke her up from the trance that had overtaken her. She was at her pine wooden desk, the smell as strong as ever, doing some late night homework. She sighed, deciding to give up on it, and headed to her window nook. She made herself comfortable on the cotton cushion pillows and wrapped her legs in a childhood blanket. She stared out through the pouring rain and pitch black night, right where her treehouse would be seen if it were not for all the amber trees blocking the view.

She smiled as she breathed in the smell of the rain that was falling. It reminded her of the first time she entered the treehouse. It was raining that day too; her mother was with her. She had never seen the house before so tears drenched her already wet face over its beauty. They both took refuge in it. While waiting for the rain to cease, her mom read her favorite books and letters her grandpa would always read. When they finished, the girl would always say, "I wish grandpa was here."

"He'll always be with you Blaire," her mother would respond, "he's all around you know matter where you are. You just have to find him."

It took Blaire many years to break apart her mother's advice and make sense of it. Little by little, the pieces fell into place.

Later that year, Blaire, for over a month, finally transported everything related to her grandpa into the treehouse. That way, Blaire thought, he'll be with me every time I'm in this treehouse – physically and mentally.

Another rumble of thunder sounded, bringing Blaire's memory to an end. She smiled, stared at her reflection in the window, and thought of how her grandpa's memories raised her. Every month meant a new note or letter from him, each with a lesson to learn or some advice for school. Blaire and her grandpa were extremely close until he had to leave.

Blaire was devastated when he left. She refused to go to school or do homework; her grades dropped and social status lowered as well. It wasn't until she received her first letter a month later that Blaire caught herself and eventually recovered.

The second Friday of each month, like clockwork, she received a new

letter. She couldn't understand how, but she wasn't complaining either. Three months later, Blaire was as good as new, but not because she moved on. It was because she visited the treehouse every day. Her routine was to go there after school ended and be back at home before supper. Her parents never questioned what she did there; they knew she was coping with a loss.

Blaire imagined the old treehouse. It took a twelve peg ladder to reach the top, each one squeaking as the pressure of her weight was on top of it. She unlatched the hook to the door in the floorboards – it too squeaked when opened. The first thing Blaire would see were old photographs of her and her grandpa, each time doing something different. The only spot that was bare was the window to the right when Blaire climbed up. It was placed perfectly so she could watch the sunset, just like she and her grandpa did so often. To the left was an old faded mattress filled with letters, notes, pictures, stuffed animals, and blankets. This was where Blaire did her thinking and talking.

Everything else, though, was a mess. Food boxes and wrappers covered the floor, water bottles lay in every corner, toys and games were all pushed into another corner, and on top of it all, more letters.

Good thing spring cleaning was right around the corner.

The sudden immense downpour of rain made Blaire jump. It sounded like firecrackers as they strike the roof. She sighed, got up, and headed to a mirror.

Her light blue eyes were starting to turn bloodshot, bags were formed under them. Her long, wavy auburn hair was full of tangles due to sleepless nights and from frustrating homework. Some of her make-up had also smeared, but she ignored it.

Blaire quickly looked outside, towards the treehouse, then back at herself. Without another thought, she rapidly put on a faded sweatshirt and beanie. She needed to be with her grandpa.

She quickly wrote a note for her parents to find, then darted outside, unaware of the thunder, lightning, and pouring rain. Tears fell as the memories flooded back as they always did. A picture of Blaire holding a puny fish flashed by. Next a scene of her grandpa explaining a constellation on a starry night. The numbness, pain, and fear that confided her when she heard of her grandpa appeared again. More memories of them laughing and spending time together had filled her mind. She covered her ears as the thoughts were almost too much to bear.

When the news had reached her, she had stayed in the treehouse for three days. Her parents had to physically carry her out, actually. Thunder rolled as Blaire continued to run; she would be there in less than a minute.

Blaire's grandpa had built that tree house. With Blaire's help, of course. It was their last project together before he suddenly passed of a heart attack.

Then, later, it seemed as if he had been raised from the dead when Blaire received her first letter. Her grandpa was always thinking ahead. Blaire received her last letter two days ago. It contained her grandpa's favorite flower, a tulip, which was now in the treehouse.

Blaire reached the house, breathing heavily. Tears were now storming down her cheeks. She was overcome by all her emotions and feelings. Today had marked three years since her grandpa's passing. She was thirteen when he died.

As she reached for the ladder, lightning flashed and something caught her eye. Blaire reached for her phone, turned on its flashlight, and pointed it at the tree holding her house's roots.

Goosebumps fired throughout Blaire's body. Her heart skipped a beat and a smile of disbelief escaped from her face.

A flower was beginning to bloom despite the thunderstorm raging on around it.

It just so happened to be a tulip, just like the one her grandpa had sent.



Michigan

By Kara Prachar, Mathmatics

Hadeophobia

By Jayde Logemann, Writing and Rhetoric

I pull at the frayed edge of my carpet square. The air is hot and sticky, but the concrete beneath my carpet is cold and a little damp. A bump on my arm from where a mosquito bit me itches and burns. Mom told me not to scratch it.

"Now, class, we're going to learn about something very important this morning."

I inch my carpet closer to the college student teaching my class and crane my neck to look at the pictures in the large paperback book she holds up. I fold my hands in my lap. I have been in enough Sunday School classes during the first four years of my life to know how to behave.

This is not regular Sunday School, however. This is Family Camp, and we have classes every morning and every evening.

"Today we are going to talk about what happens to us after we die."

I straighten. I know about death.

I attended my first funeral last winter. The girl who died was in my sister's Kindergarten class. I had known that she was really sick, which is why she had a wheelchair, and then she got even more sick, so she moved to the hospital. Then one day my mother came into our room and told my sister and me that Beth had died. She asked us if we wanted to go to the funeral, and I didn't want to, but my sister did, so we all went.

We dressed up and went to a little crowded building and placed a card inside a little basket. A lot of people were dabbing at their eyes with tissues. There was a big room in the middle of the building with chairs set up, and there was a big white box at the front of the room. Beth was inside that box, but she looked different. She was not in her wheelchair, and she was wearing a lacy pink dress. Her eyes were closed. I thought it was all very strange.

"There are two different places where people go when they die: heaven and hell."

I know about heaven as well. That is where my mom told me Beth is.

The teacher points to the pictures in her book. "In heaven, there is no sickness or crying," she says.

Beth must not be in her wheelchair anymore.

"There are streets made out of gold."

That sounds ridiculous. I wonder why anyone would want to leave gold in the middle of the street for cars to drive over. It would get dirty.

"Most importantly, boys and girls, heaven is the place where Jesus lives," the teacher says, a bright smile on her face.

I have heard plenty of stories about Jesus, and I know that He lived on earth a long time ago. I also know that He performed miracles, dressed strangely, and had a beard.

"But, boys and girls, there is also a place called hell," the teacher

continues, and she turns the page and points to darker pictures. "Hell is the place where people go when they die if they have not trusted Christ to be their Savior. Hell is full of fire."

I shudder at the picture of flames she points to. I burnt myself once touching a pan that had just come out of the oven, and I remember how much it hurt. More than that, I remember how upset my mom was as she held my hand under the faucet. She seemed to think that something bad would happen if we didn't keep my hand under cold water.

"Hell is a very scary place, boys and girls," the teacher says. Her face now looks sad. "The worst part of hell is that God is not there, and people who go to hell when they die have to spend all of eternity apart from Him." She closes her book and sets it gently down on the floor beside her chair. "We are going to pray now, boys and girls."

I fold my hands beneath my chin and bow my head, but I do not close my eyes. The book is right in front of me, and I stare at its cover. There are two pictures and a few words that I cannot read. One of the pictures shows a bright city set upon a wispy cloud, and the other has bright red flames licking up towards a terrifying darkness. I do not know which one I would go to if I were to die. I do not know how to know. I have heard before in Sunday School about something called salvation, and I am not sure whether or not I have it.

"Sweetheart, are you all right?" a voice asks, jerking me from my thoughts. The teacher has finished praying, and the rest of the children are lining up at the door. I jump to my feet and join them.

That afternoon, confusing thoughts about salvation, heaven, and hell are still pouring through my mind. I find myself walking down a gravel road through the campground, holding my mom's hand.

"Mommy?" I say, slipping my hand from hers to scratch the mosquito bite on my arm.

"Yes, dear?" my mom replies, looking down at me with a smile.

"Mommy, can I be saved?" I ask, squinting up at her hopefully.

My mom stops. She seems surprised by my question. "Of course you can," she says at last. "Let's sit down and talk." She leads me over to a short railing beside the road, and we sit. "Do you know what it means to be saved?" my mother asks.

I nod apprehensively. "It is when you ask Jesus to forgive you for all the bad things that you have done," I reply. "Is that right?"

My mother nods. "Then you ask Him to come and live inside your heart," she says. "Jesus can forgive you of your sins because He died on the cross. You know about that, right?"

"Yes," I say. I have heard that story many times.

"Do you want to be saved?" my mother asks.

"What happens?" I ask, still a little confused.

"The Holy Spirit will come to live inside your heart," my mother replies. "Jesus will forgive you of your sins, too, so that you can go to heaven when you die."

"What do I have to do?" I ask.

"You need to pray and ask Jesus to forgive you," my mother replies.

"Do you want to do that?"

I nod and close my eyes, folding my hands under my chin. I murmur a few words, asking God to come into my life and forgive my sins. When I am finished and I look up, there are tears hanging from my mother's eyes.

"Mommy, what's wrong?" I ask, horribly alarmed. I had thought that salvation was a good thing, but now I am not sure.

"Nothing," my mother replies with a smile as she wraps me in her arms. "I am so happy."

Easter Egg

By Eliza Merritt, Nursing

petite Kate Thompson bends studiously over an egg, dunking it first in one color, then another. Her perfect blonde curls bounce rhythmically, all of her concentration focused on the task as if it is of utmost importance. Sunshine plays on the windowsill, drying the dye, and spilling over to the kitchen tile. A long shopping list lies on the table, which includes cinnamon and dried cranberries. The young woman rises with a resigned sigh and thumbs through several cookbooks, before grabbing her list from the table and blue scarf from the hall rack. She rushes out into the spring afternoon, not seeming to notice the tulips that have sprouted early in a neighboring yard. Walking with purpose, she watches the ground listlessly, never deeply inhaling the scent of new life around her.

Hours later, the homey smell of baked goods fills the modest one-story. She has baked enough for a feast: muffins, rolls, and holiday bread still warm from the oven. Feminine fingers drum on the wall calendar, dancing over "Family Easter Sunrise, 6 a.m." After a pause, she flips back a few pages. The fingers stop cold on a date from last winter, one marked with a heart in black ink. Her shoulders sag for a moment until the door bursts open with a striking man of about twenty-five in somewhat formal wear. His dark hair is rebelling from its professional look after a long day. The woman's voice rings with new happiness when she asks Nathan about his day, and he sweeps her into a hug.

He scans the food, saying, "this all looks good. They'll like it. Jay's prob'ly going to eat three of these rolls..."

Nate is a blur of motion, opening cupboards, rustling through mail, and never sees his wife's hunched shoulders.

"Hope you're right." She hesitates. "Nate, I...I should have known that it would be different this year, the family traditions. I should have known. It's so hard," her voice trails off.

The crucifixion scene glows from the TV screen in the dim lit living room.

"I used to cry every time we watched this when I was little," comments Kate in a hushed tone.

"There's a happy ending, Kate," her husband smiles.

"Mhmm, yes," she answers, but with a little quaver, almost unsure.

She looks past the on-screen image of the man being pulled from the cross, his pale body limply cradled in the arms of a mourning Mary. Instead, she sees hope dying in the arms of a new mother, harsh hospital lights above a still baby who never learned to breathe.

Nate mentally ticks off tomorrow's schedule as he turns the lights off all over the house. Meanwhile, Kate is bent over a tiny blanket, pink polka-dot-

ted. It appears handmade, yet never used. The young woman stares into a dark corner with large, intense eyes.

The early morning is still dark, but the home is full of rustling noises and footsteps. Nathan pulls on a bulky sweatshirt over his jeans and man socks, a heavy ensemble in contrast to his light and carefree demeanor. Kate slips into a lavender dress and white ballet flats, carefully chosen for their pleasant and unburdened appearance. In the kitchen, she assembles fruit juice and day-old hard boiled eggs in a picnic basket. The couple drives in sleepy silence to a nearby park, where a crowd of people greet them heartily. There are families of young and old, all faintly resembling Kate. One pair keep a newborn child warm in their tight huddle, and wave over the newcomers. Kate looks pale and worn in the chilly, before-dawn air as she holds the baby's hand, and her red eyes match her tight lipped mouth.

The crowd trudges through tall prairie grass toward a hill. After a climb, the women unfurl blankets onto the dewy ground, and all wait at the scenic spot. The sun peeks up over the horizon, and then glorious light fills the world with sparkle. An older man reads from a well-worn Bible: "Why are you afraid? He is not here, He has risen." At the familiar words, wet trails fall silently down Kate's face. Nate takes her hand. She is transfixed by the sun, and its warmth dries her tears. Her body suddenly relaxes, and her curls are crushed against Nate's warm chest.

As the group slowly make their way back to the Thompson's house, Kate is shocked to hear the grass softly whispering. Color lights up her peripheral vision. "Oh Nate, the James house has tulips already!"

"When I was little, we tried planting tulips, but they never bloomed. We should give it a try though," Nate suggests.

"Yes," Kate murmurs, "I think I might like to try."



Fa(r)mily

By Elizabeth Rice, Christian Education & Youth Ministry

Nowhere in her house was safe when her father was angry. He would find a way to get to her, no matter how late it was at night. I once found him in her room, pushing the door to her room open, relieving her of all effort. I had her all bundled up under her blanket. "You going to join me?" he asked. "No, I'm going to bed," I said. "At least, I'm going to bed," he said. She mumbled something under her blanket. "Come keep me warm," she said. "No, I'm going to bed," I said. I shook my head. "I don't want the door. What if the door is open?" She laughed just a little bit. "You think the door is open that high tonight?"

Cigarettes and Witches

By Joshua Trease, History

I woke up to a steady rain falling outside my room. It was fitting for a visit to Ophelia.

The taxi fare would cost me the last little bit of money I had. Hopefully my clients could give me a bit of a slush fund when I met with them later tonight. The ride there I spent in a semi-comfortable silence. I say semi-comfortable because I was filled with a thousand different thoughts and feelings. I'd been with a lot of girls, but Ophelia was the only witch I had been with.

"Here we are, sir," the driver said, pulling up to a building divided into five different stores. Without a word, I climbed out of the taxi, and he drove away. I made a mental note to tip well the next time I took a cab.

Between a sub shop and a laundromat there was a keyhole. If anyone was looking, they wouldn't realize what it was. Not all witches were so thorough in hiding their lairs, but Ophelia was a bit old fashioned. She liked her privacy. Helped her focus on her studies.

She didn't ask me to return the key she gave me, so I never did. Thank god, too. She was an invaluable asset in my work. I opened the door that was hidden between the stores. It was narrow, and I had to squeeze through. Then down the stairs to the relatively unknown and very private basement.

"Ophelia?" I shouted. There was no answer. I didn't expect one. I wandered my way through the piles of books that dominated the apartment. Her collection was out of control, and it was sure to continue growing. I made my way to her office. The door was open, and there inside she was, pouring over a book. She hadn't changed. Roughly 5'2, too skinny, bags under her eyes, hair frizzy and tangled. It had probably been a few days since she last showered. I watched her for a minute or so. Her dedication was beautiful.

"Ophelia."

She looked up, finally. Her face remained the same, betraying no emotion. "How long have you been there?" she said, voice heavy with disinterest.

"An hour," I said.

"Ah. You've gotten more patient."

"I've only been here two minutes. It was a joke."

"I don't get it."

"Of course not."

"Why are you here?"

I sighed. Straight to business as usual. "I need your help."

"With?"

"What can you tell me about vampires?"

"They hate garlic."

"Are they dead?"

"Undead."

"Jesus Christ, you're impossible," I said, but I realized it was an odd question. "Look, could I talk to one?"

"Does the vampire speak English?"

"I mean a dead one. Could I speak to a dead vampire's ghost?"

She didn't respond. She stood up, walked through the maze of books on the floor, and ended up in front of a shelf. For a few moments, she ran a finger along the spines, reading titles and racking her brain. After a minute, she moved to another shelf and repeated the pattern. She did this three times before finally finding what she wanted. She pulled a—relatively—small volume and returned to her desk. She cracked the book open and got to reading.

"You could do with some organization." I suggested.

"No time." Her eyes didn't leave the shelves.

"Have you read all of those?"

"Shush."

"I'll just step outside, then. Be back in a bit."

"You should quit smoking."

"Fuck you."

"I won't if you smell like cigarettes."

And she probably wouldn't if I didn't. Another trip through the piles of books, a walk up the stairs, and another squeeze through the door and I was back on the street. It was my last pack. A third of it was gone already. I flipped one out, lit it up, and watched the cars go by.

The average smoker takes four minutes to get through a cigarette. Everyone has their own speed, influenced somewhat by the type of cigarette they smoked and whether they've ever been a waiter trying to squeeze one in during their five minute breaks. It took me about six minutes to get through mine. I like to relax when I smoke. Try to clear the head a bit.

I returned to her office to find her head collapsed onto the book. She had fallen asleep. I can't say I was surprised—in the time I had known her, she often worked herself to the point of exhaustion; she had probably been up all night. It was pretty obvious I wasn't getting anything from her this morning. With little trouble, I picked her up and threw her over my shoulder. She needed real rest in a real bed.

Of course, there was a chance her bed would be covered in books. Nowhere in her house was safe from her haphazard piles. When we had lived together, I once found a tome about Persian sorcery in the fridge. I awkwardly pushed the door to her room open, relieved that her bed was clear. With a bit of effort, I had her all bundled up under her blankets. She opened her left eye a bit. "You going to join me?" she asked.

"Not today. I've got to find some answers. That book in English?"

She mumbled something under her breath before turning around.

"Come keep me warm," she said, back to me.

I shook my head. "I don't have the time. What if I come back tonight?"

She laughed just a little bit. "You think the chances of me sleeping are that high tonight?"

"Not if I'm real lucky."

"Are you really going to tell me no right now?"

"Guess not." I said. Hesitantly I crawled into bed next to her and wrapped my arms around her. She was asleep in a few seconds. I stayed there twenty minutes, until my sense of urgency came back. Trying not to wake her, I removed myself and went back to her study. The book was still there on her desk, wide open.

It was written in Latin.

Ophelia spoke a dozen different languages, and could read several more than that. I could speak English, and I knew how to tell someone to go reproduce with themselves in Russian. The book was useless without her. Cursing my luck under my breath, I went back to her room and crawled back into bed with her. My meeting wasn't until evening, after all. She'd have plenty of time to tell me what I needed. For the first time in a week, I relaxed. Being next to her did what smoking couldn't.

It calmed me down.

I woke up a few hours later. She was already gone. Four hours of sleep didn't seem like it would be long enough to make up for what was probably several days without it, but this was normal for her. Chances are she'd again be up for two days. I stayed in her bed for a few minutes, not quite ready to talk to her. Eventually, I got up and went back to her study.

"Did you sleep well?" I asked as I entered.

"Very," she said, not looking up from the book.

We were in silence for a slightly uncomfortable amount of time. This was why it was difficult. She said nothing but the bare minimum. She sometimes said less than that. She was almost clueless in social situations. She would probably never go outside if she could help it. She hardly did anyway.

"How's the book?"

"Uninteresting to me. I think it has an answer for you, though. Vampires are undead, which is a tricky place to start at anyway. The common theme is that at one point, they have all been dead. Curiously, what most refer to as the soul doesn't leave them for one reason or another. So the body is dead, the soul still inside it. The soul, not able to leave, wills the body back into action. If the vampire is killed after this, then the soul is able to finally leave the body that it's been willing into action for however long. The writer has an interesting term for it—no equivalent in English. "Redead" is how I would put it.

"Redead" is not a word.

"Language is malleable."

"Is malleable a word?"

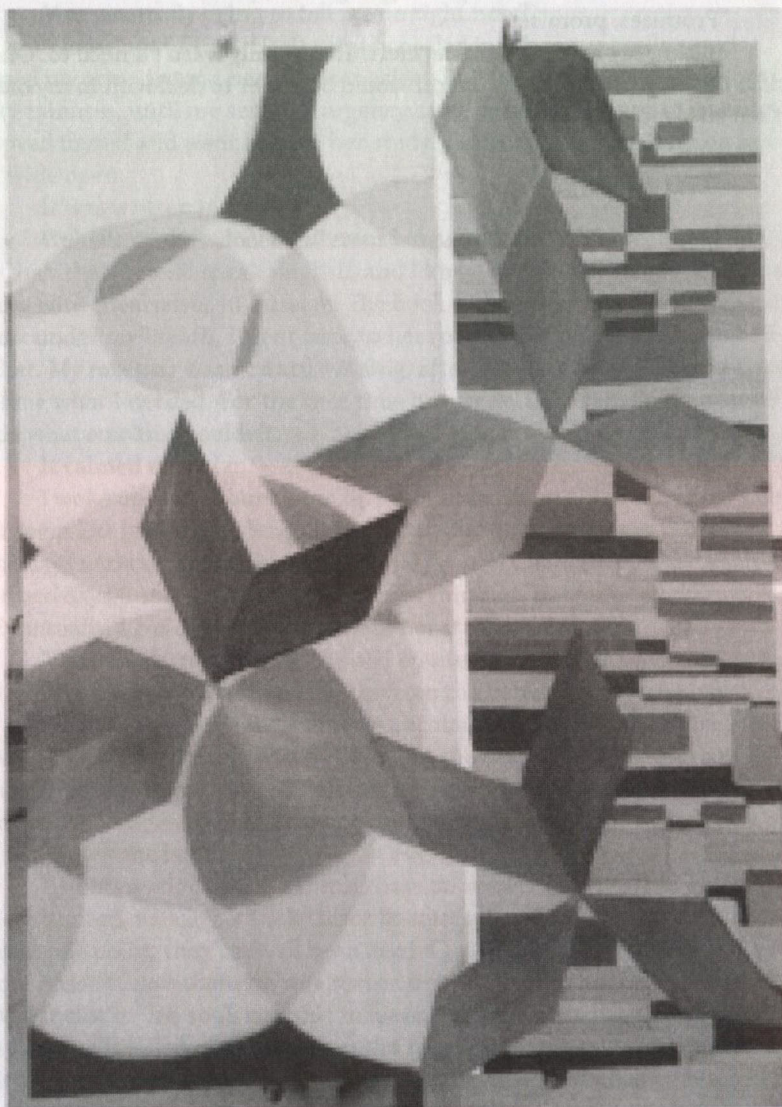
"The problem is how much strain keeping a body going puts on the vampire's soul. Essentially, it slowly goes insane, and, at the same time, grows in power, and I don't think I need to warn you about the dangers of powerful ghosts. Imagine how powerful a vampire is, and imagine the worst spirit you've ever fought. Be careful."

Insane vampire spirits. This job was getting better and better. "Thanks,

Ophelia. Let me know next time you're going to sleep. I'll come over."

"Promises, promises."

I didn't say another word as I left. There really wasn't a need to. Once outside, I lit another cigarette. Cancer would be easier to deal with in my old age than she would be.



Left v. Right

By Emily Wallace, Graphic Design

Nonfiction

First Place -

Justine Johnson

"Clips of Different Tics"

Second Place -

Lucas Fratzke

"Little Boxes"

Honorable Mentions -

Jessica Van Beeb

"Blue Eyes and a Crooked Smile"

Amie Adams

"As Summer Fades"

First Place

Judge's Notes:

Personal essays get much of their power from confessional honesty, and this essay lives up to its first sentence: "Let me be frank." The narrator helps us to gain understanding and sympathy through a frank portrayal of a disorder others might hide: Tourette syndrome. Through her brave openness, we learn that we too might be liberated from our own disorders. Paradoxically, hidden weaknesses lose power when they are simply claimed and confronted.

Clips of Different Tics

By Justine Johnson, Writing and Rhetoric

Let me be frank. My name is Justine, I'm 21 years old, and I have Tourette syndrome. I have been ticking since age seven, but I didn't diagnose myself until I was eleven. As I am sitting here, my eyes are squeezing shut sporadically. My teeth click together and my jaw clenches periodically. These are known as tics, and I cannot completely prevent them from occurring. There are a number of different prejudices associated with my neurological disorder, all of which I have discredited either in conversations, public speaking assignments, or research papers. My 20-year-old brother also has Tourette's, but our cases are quite different because I also live with a mild case of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. I function well in society, but I struggle with academics on occasion due to focusing problems. I want to tell you about a few of my experiences over the past fourteen years.

Age 7

My pastor's wife was my idol. She'd known me since I was a year old and I'd always tried to be just like her. I noticed that she cleared her throat all the time. I thought that was pretty cool, so I started doing it, too. You know, like any seven-year-old might do. Most people would never have noticed that connection, and if they had, it would have been dismissed as a child's cute attempt at copying her role model.

But it wasn't cute. And I couldn't stop.

Age 9

My family drove to Colorado to visit my cousins in July. A month earlier, I had started battling my eyes to fight a case of summer allergies. It became the replacement for the throat clearing. Mama didn't like it, and she told me so. After a week in a higher altitude, I sat in the backseat of a minivan clutching my cousin's hands to keep her from biting her nails. "If you bite your nails, I'll squeeze your hands. If I bat my eyes, you squeeze my hands." We fought it for eight hours as our vehicle approached sea level.

A few days later, a dozen and a half family members sat around the crowded dining room table at Grandpa's house. My young stomach clenched with excitement. I called across the room to my mother. "Mom! I didn't bat my eyes at all today!"

But my excitement didn't last long. I kept battling my eyes. And I couldn't stop.

Age 12

My church produced an original play with a cast of junior high students right before Thanksgiving. I played one of the four main characters along with a couple of my best friends at the time. During one of the performances, I sat cross-legged backstage with my friend Victoria waiting for the act to end so we could go back on. We told secrets in hushed tones. I told her about my Tourette's, which I had named after my brother got diagnosed by our chiropractor the year before. "I never would have known," Victoria said. "It isn't noticeable at all."

But it felt noticeable. And I always knew.

Age 14

My mom always sorted through bills and coupons at the kitchen table. Sometimes after lunch, she would pull out the checkbook and work for a while. One afternoon, I sat opposite her, blinking hard and shrugging my shoulders. She looked up at my face and noticed. "Relax, honey."

"But I can't help it!"

"You know, baseball players have tics. How do you know that you have Tourette's? Maybe there's another condition that makes you do those things."

But my brother's disorder wasn't questioned. And I couldn't relax.

Age 16

My parents' bedroom had a television in it. Sometimes we would watch shows in there to avoid distracting a sibling still doing school or to avoid watching the news downstairs. At Christmas time, ABC played *The Santa Clause 2* on a Sunday evening. I sat on my parents' bed, watching it alone. During a commercial break, my head started twitching and my eyes batted more than usual. For about thirty seconds, my life stood still as my body kept moving. My adolescent brain told me that I could stop any time, but my nerves laughed hysterically and seized control.

Suddenly it was over. The commercial break ended and so did my very first tic attack. I didn't know what to call it at the time, although I now knew what paralyzing fear felt like. I told my mentor, Julie, about it in an email later

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that night.

But I never told my parents. And the attacks happened many more times.

Age 17

My house has had a craft room addition on the second story of our garage ever since we built it when I was in middle school. That winter, Mama got on a Hallmark movie kick and she sat at her sewing machine desk watching the television every time a movie played. One night, *Front of the Class* played. The film was based on the life of teacher Brad Cohen, who has Tourette's and overcame great adversity to become an educator. As I stood just around the corner, out of sight of my mother, tears rolled down my cheeks and my eyes remained glued to the screen. Young Brad endured bullying from a group of cruel older boys who mocked his vocal tics and shoved him to the ground. My chin jerked upward in time to Brad's panicked sobs as I backed quickly out of the craft room and raced to my room to finish crying.

No one ever bullied me. In fact, most people still couldn't tell that I was different. This movie, however, was the first representation of my disorder. Beyond my brother and a guy at my church whom I barely knew, I had never stared in the face of a ticking individual. It felt good to know that other people were learning about the thing I lived with, even if my own struggle was never noticed. I promoted the film as art worth consuming.

But I couldn't forget that no one saw my tics. And that made me feel invalidated.

Age 18

My third online college class that I ever took in high school was Intro to Sociology. The final assignment required me to write a research paper on a topic that I found especially important. So of course, I wrote about Tourette syndrome. Through writing that paper, I learned so much about why my body refused to listen to me when I told it to stop doing silly things. The websites I pored over told me about the different labels for various disorders associated with mine, and I learned about my OCD through this research. I described various tics and provided statistics left and right. The professor, however, wasn't impressed with my failure to write in APA format, so I got a B.

But I didn't care much about my grade. And I possessed a wealth of new information.

Age 19

My third semester of real college brought a Fantasy, Folktales, and Fabulism writing class with Dr. Martin. When given the challenge of writing a fantasy story, I created a sister and a brother who protected people in danger on a contracted position. The brother had Tourette's, which I did not directly name but characterized quite obviously. When a monster had to be defeated, the siblings discovered that the beast was drawn to abnormalities in human beings. A stretch of imagination and cheesily written, but I was determined to finish it.

The climax of the tale brought the monster against the brother. I wrote a predictable ending and turned it in, then drafted an alternate ending that killed both siblings and allowed the monster to prevail. I sent this alternate ending to my roommate. When she finished reading it, Brianne looked up at me and didn't say anything for a long time. The words she finally spoke were gentle and urged me to describe my real thoughts and feelings about having a neurological disorder.

I had written about Tourette's many times before. This time, however, was the first that I had been vulnerable enough to actually characterize a fictional character with my own pain. Such a fragile bunch of words with an iron-based will behind them. I didn't know what I was doing, really. But that story opened up new possibilities for the way I thought about Tourette's. And I could finally be free to tell my story without doubt.

Second Place

Judge's Notes:

The author of this essay makes a number of smart moves. He incorporates research, grounding us in the ordinary verifiable particulars of a common, uniform place: a suburb in California. Then he gives us enough quirky detail about his family, as they travel away from that predictable suburban home, that we can see the place anew when we return, no longer dismissing it as too-ordinary. We like to be challenged to re-define the way we think, and this essay does that sort of challenging.

Little Boxes

By Lucas Fratzke, Literature & Writing and Rhetoric

My family of five is nothing special. We are unique only in the sense that there is no other family of five under the name Fratzke, with a dad named Ed, a mom named Teresa, and three kids, Megan, Paige, and myself, Lucas.

We live in the suburbs of Los Angeles County, in the city of Lakewood (containing neither a lake nor woods), to be precise, in a house of no importance, on a street of no importance. Lakewood is simply a grid of cookie-cutter, pastel colored houses: little boxes, green and pink and blue and yellow, each house required to look a certain way, to be a certain way, and to attract no more attention than it should; and they all look just the same.

Lakewood was one of the first and largest post-World War II American suburbs. It boomed from farmland in the 1950's to a well developed city of around 70,000 by 1960. Lakewood was built as quickly and efficiently as possible. Crews, made up of usually war veterans in their 20's were separated by skill. One crew would pour concrete into foundations from mixing trucks, the next would pass through nailing down floors with pneumatic hammers, one cut lumber for framing with electric saws, the next would set up the frames, the next would lay rough plaster, the next would smooth it, the next would lay rafters, the next would roof, the next shingle, and so on. Grids of houses were made in record time with an assembly line of men. No two floor plans were

put next to each other, but there were about five floor plans all throughout the entire city.

Memoirist and long-time Lakewood resident D. J. Waldie writes in his memoir about Lakewood, "If the workman looked up from laying rafters, they saw a row of houses with bundles of shingles being lifted by conveyor belts to shinglers on the roof. Beyond them was a row of house frames being sheathed in tar paper and chicken wire. Beyond them was another row of houses gray with new stucco. Beyond that row would be another row of houses, only a few days older, being painted. Behind them, nearly out of sight, would be a street of finished houses, forty-six to a block" (*Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*, 1996 D. J. Waldie).

Lakewood is predicated on predictability. Uniformity. Order.

This is where my family and I grew up. Just another house on the street, another security screen door, pastel colored house, green lawn, minivan, existing peacefully and blissfully ignorant under the bright California sun.

Cars line the freeways, bumper to bumper, dead stopped. Rush hour. Los Angeles. It doesn't matter if you are trying to get into the city or out, cars congest the freeways like a school of fish in a river, forever fighting the current each one striving to be different. But the cars, like the fish, just blend together, each the same. TomTom, a leading navigation and GPS company, has given Los Angeles a 39% congestion rate, coming in at tenth place among the largest cities in the world and the highest ranking U.S. city.

My father is behind the wheel of my family's silver minivan, white knuckled in anger, cheeks bright red, half hidden by his white beard, sick of the cars, the traffic, and the smog. He is originally from Minnesota but grew up primarily in Alaska. How he ended up settling in the middle of Los Angeles is a story, which grows longer each time you hear it, for him to tell you.

We are heading out of the city, east, towards Iowa. That is where I decided, for a reason I can't quite remember, to go to college. As my family and I sit in traffic at about four in the morning, I look to my left and, past my sister in the seat next to me, I see a once-top-of-the-line mini-van, a middle aged woman with much too gray hair for her age in the driver's seat. She vents into her cell phone while her kids sleep soundly in the back seat. Her friend on the phone is probably confiding some new secret to staying happy, some new quick fix to combat the loneliness and drudgery of the everyday stresses of "living the dream" in the famed City of Angels.

I look to my right and through the tinted, fingerprinted window, see an expensive Jaguar driven by an expensive business suit. His designer glasses reflecting the multitude of brake lights in front of him, obscuring the emptiness in his expensive eyes.

He pulls ahead and a black Cadillac Escalade impedes my view. A rumbling, numbing hum from the bassline of some mediocre rap music blares from his much-too-expensive subwoofers and the heavily tinted windows rattle in protest; any louder and it seems those windows, meant to hide and intimidate,

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will shatter and he will be exposed. The driver side window rolls down slightly and a pair of angry eyes meet my gaze. I look away quickly as not to offend him.

The sun is not even up yet, but the street lights and brake lights of the cars in front of us paint the grey sky with a dull, industrial glow. The lights blur with the heavy blanket of thick smog that covers everything. Every breath is full of it. This coarse and dense smell of exhaust, burning rubber, hot asphalt, and the lingering smell of salt from the ocean. It's inescapable.

Los Angeles smog is now used as a synonym with the type of smog known as photochemical smog, a condition that occurs when primary pollutants, most commonly emissions from industrial facilities and car exhaust, react under the influence of the sun to produce a mixture of hundreds of different hazardous chemicals known as secondary pollutants.

I fell asleep some time before we got off the 605 and onto the 15, the Interstate that runs from San Diego up to the border of Montana and Canada. The next thing I remember is the sun peeking over the horizon somewhere in the middle of the Mojave Desert. My sister Paige sits in the back seat and chomps on some Cheerios that she brought in a Zip-Lock. Her pixie-short, blonde hair is disheveled and her glasses she has left in the cupholder. My other sister, Megan, lays fast asleep in the seat to my immediate left, her short, dark brown hair falls in loose curls, illuminated by the sun. My mother sits attentive in the passenger seat, pouring over map after map, trying to plan the route for the day. My father sits behind the wheel, calm, reflective, the newly risen sun gleams brilliantly off of his wire-rimmed glasses and paints his white beard in a majestic golden light.

We're triplets actually, my sisters and I, each a minute apart from each other. Megan, then me, then Paige. People always ask me what it's like, being a triplet. I never really know how to respond to the question other than like having two sisters the same age as you. The three of us are all incredibly different people. Don't get me wrong, we have our similarities, but the three of us are all immensely different. The two of them have a bit closer of a bond than I do. The two of them share in just a bit of that twin telepathy. Now, however, after taking three years of American Sign Language, they just sign to each other and I sit and watch in frustration as they giggle about some shared joke that I'll never know.

Our minivan cruises down the desert highway, just a speck, dwarfed by the immense flatness of this land. I think back to our house, where we were just several hours earlier. I wonder how many people that live in those identical, pastel colored houses ever take road trips like the one we're on. Driving so far, towards goodbye.

I push the thought from my mind.

Las Vegas, Nevada approaches, and we reach the city before any real traffic hits the freeways. We stop for breakfast at a fast food restaurant. I swear it was a McDonald's because I distinctly remember ordering their big, oval shaped, crispy hash browns, however both of my sisters avidly claim that it was a Carl's Jr. because they distinctly remember getting their small bite sized,

crispy hash browns. These are the kinds of things we bicker about, usually the two of them versus me.

After a brief stop at the undecided fast food place, we returned to the road, heading towards Utah's famous Zion National Park. Paige and my mother debated for a good hour whether or not we would drive through Zion or not since it would add about three hours to our drive for the day. Ultimately, my mom's ruling stood and we adjusted our course to Zion.

Zion National Park looks like every stereotypical Western movie you have ever seen: miles of bright red and orange canyons, sprinkled with occasional desert trees and streams running through its cracks and valleys. My mom wants to stop for pictures at just about every bend in the road, and the three of us protest profusely each time, unwilling to leave the cool, air conditioned van for the blazing hot interstate and canyon. When we would stop at a designated scenic lookout, I remember watching other onlookers draw and paint with my sister, a talented artist herself.

After several hours taking in the sights, we finally reached our stop for the night in Cedar City, Utah: a small desert town seeming solely designated to be a traveler's pit stop. It was named in 1851 by some Mormon pioneers after the abundance of local trees, which were actually junipers and not Cedars; the error of the namesake reminded me of home.

After the twelve hour drive, the van had turned from a place of air-conditioned solace to a minefield. My sister Paige and I bickered back and forth over how far back I should be allowed to lay my seat. I argued that because she had the entire backseat to herself, I should be allowed to lay my seat back further even if it restricted her from going to that side of the seat, and she argued that because the seat was already so full of luggage, mine included, that I should be giving her more room because she was already restricted because of the luggage. Neither of us won, and the rest of my family, sick of our bickering, approached Cedar City as an oasis from the ceaseless racket of useless fighting.

After we had unloaded our luggage, we headed to dinner: an Applebee's was decided upon to be the lucky hosts of the travel-weary Fratzke five for the evening. We hoped a good meal would be enough to amend our disagreements for the time being.

We opened the door to a filled restaurant, every single table full, and not a voice to be heard; the only sound audible was the dull clink and clank of silverware on plates. Immediately, we felt every eye in the place train on us and this previously innocent Applebee's was turned into an eerie scene straight out of Twilight Zone. I fully expected the doors to lock behind us and to be consumed by the inhabitants for upsetting the norm, for uncovering a secret not meant to be uncovered.

Our waiter was from the UK. A loud and rambunctious young man, he threw jokes our way and laughed wholeheartedly upon response; we never felt the silent, judging eyes of those around us leave. What a strange place.

The next morning, we drove through Utah and half of Wyoming for about twelve hours to reach Casper, Wyoming, the second largest city in the

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state at just over fifty five thousand people, twenty five thousand smaller than the small suburban community of Lakewood.

Now my sisters and I have barely been outside of the Los Angeles area. The whole big lifted trucks and country music and boots and hats and the like was not something we thought people *actually* wore. Well Casper, Wyoming proved that notion wrong immediately.

I also remember the town just felt dark, depressing even, as if the air was somehow heavier, almost oppressing. I remember always being alert, always staying on guard. I didn't sleep well that night.

The next morning we fought more than usual. We were set off by the smallest misstep, just an accidental kick when fidgeting in the car would and my sister was on a five minute long tirade about how awful it was to be stuck in the car with me.

At one point, I was driving through Wyoming, going 80 miles an hour when the speed limit was 75, and my father yelled that I slow down and respond to him as "sir" or forfeit the driver's seat. I relented the driver's seat. We have never had that kind of relationship.

I was confused and hurt, too tired for tears. I had no solace from my sisters who did nothing but judge and criticize my driving. The problem with road trips with a family in a minivan is that there is no place to hide, no place to go to heal up and move on.

I could not figure out why we were fighting so much, why everything someone would say would make my stomach churn with anger, every snide comment laden with poison would pierce like a dagger.

After the unmemorable night in Casper, we drove to Mount Rushmore and the beautifully forested Black Hills. They were a hell of a sight for such sore eyes and sore hearts.

Megan recounts when she first learned of Mount Rushmore back in grade school, she remembers just brushing the place off, certain that she would never see the place in her life. Suddenly we were face to face with the massive, carved stone faces, a light rain falling from the sky, Midwestern thunder rolling and clapping through, and the presidential faces seemed to laugh every time another thunderclap made us jump.

A number of years ago, before my sisters and I were born, my parents made this same road trip with some friends of theirs, Stacie and Todd. They stayed in some cabins tucked away in the hills for a night or two as a thunderstorm rolled in; my parents found the same cabins and that was where we stayed the night, as a thunderstorm rolled in.

My sisters and I sat around under an overhang on the wooden deck, huddled around a small fire, as I smoked my brand new corn cob pipe, the brilliant smell of damp wood and evergreen trees mingled with wood smoke and pipe tobacco. We were truly happy for the first time in a while, laughing as loud as thunder with tears falling like the rain. This was our last night together before they dropped me off and I was on my own in a state I had never been to before, really alone for the first time in my life.

We have always had each other, the three of us. No matter what, we have *always* been there for each other. I guess that is what I should say whenever someone asks what it's like being a triplet. You're never alone, for better or worse; you constantly have a friend at your side, whether you want them or not.

This night under a foreign sky, that poured water and ice, that roared its thunderous roar, would be our last. And that is when I realized why we had all been fighting so much this trip: we were scared. Up until this point, I had never really thought I'd miss my sisters yet here I was with tears rolling down my cheeks.

By the next day we had made it to Iowa and I had moved into my dorm and just like that I was standing by myself in the Wal-Mart parking lot in Sioux Center watching that silver minivan disappear into the endless fields of corn, not quite sure what to do with myself.

I didn't know this at the time, but Paige told me the four of them were very quiet the rest of their drive to Chicago, not quite sure what to do with themselves either.

My family still lives in that unimportant house on that unimportant street; just another cookie cutter, pastel colored house; another box on the hillside that looks just the same as the ones next to it. But there is something that makes that unimportant pastel colored house different from the ones around it: we live in it, the Fratzke five. We have triplets, and a beagle named Dakota.

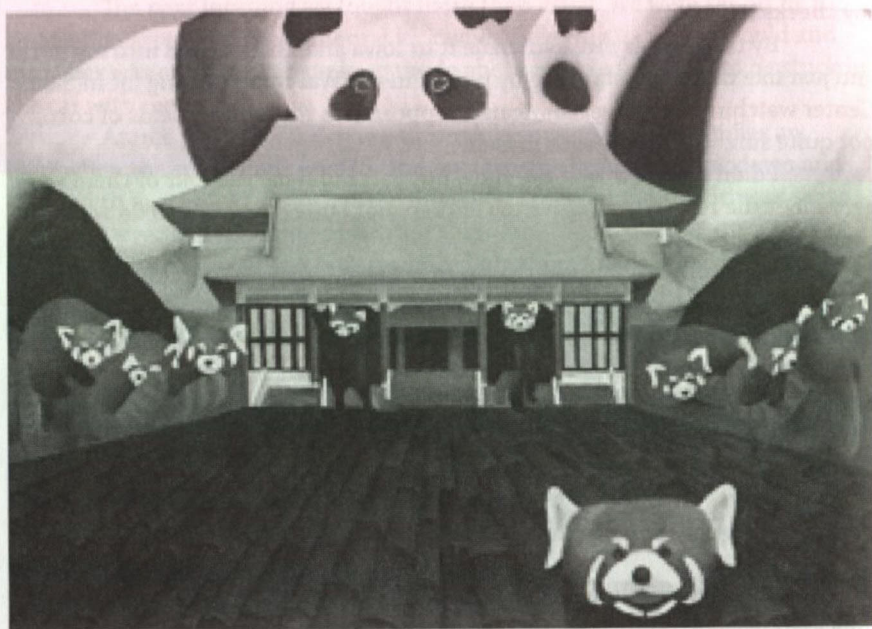
To our left lives a family of six. The father, a rounded man with a big bushy mustache and even rounder and bushier voice, is a patrol cop. The mother, a nurse who usually works the night shift. The four kids, whose names I constantly forget, are a continual source of rambunctious activity and general hilarity.

To our right lives a newly married couple and their adorable and awfully loud newborn son.

Directly across lives a family of four. The father, a Marine vet, is a constant source of boldness, especially with fireworks on the Fourth of July, and security on my end of the street.

Each house holds within it something special.

And my family and I are no exception.



Pandemonium

By Carrie Bouwman, Writing and Rhetoric

Honorable Mention

Blue Eyes and a Crooked Smile

By Jessica Van Beek, Accounting

He walks slowly, with a slight swagger, as if he has nothing to do and nowhere to be, while I walk quickly and briskly, as if I'm running late for an appointment. Slow, casual walkers usually drive me crazy, but he doesn't.

He is often the comedian between the two of us. While I am shy and would prefer not to be the center of attention, he craves making anyone crack a smile or laugh uncontrollably at one of his jokes. Although I've heard some of his jokes a million times and they drive me crazy, he doesn't.

He is a master at all of the outdoor sports: hunting, fishing, and such. He grew up with a dad who was interested and willing to teach him all there is to know about a Remington 870 and hundreds of other guns and bows. Although my siblings and I spent a lot of time outdoors with our dad, the extent of my knowledge only reaches as far as how to bait a fishing hook. Ever since he and I started dating, fishing has always been a "date night" option in the warm months of summer, and ice fishing when the air turns bitterly cold and the lakes freeze over. He has also brought me along to hunt deer, which has to be one of the most peaceful and boring outdoor sports I have ever experienced. You may consider duck hunting more exciting than deer hunting, but only if you enjoy waking at the butt crack of dawn, squeezing into a pair of camouflage waders, and standing in four feet of water for hours on end, praying that the camouflage is acting as a cloak of invisibility so a few ducks fly over your head. These various seasons are his passion and they drive me nuts, but he doesn't.

He is a busybody; he has trouble sitting still or planning a day of relaxation. No matter how tired he is or what mood he's in, he always has to have a "project" to work on, such as building shelves for a closet or constructing his very own duck shack. I, on the other hand, would have no complaints if I got to lie on the couch and relax all day, every day. His need to always do somethings drives me crazy, but he doesn't.

He is truly a man in the fact that he doesn't know how to pick up after himself. He leaves empty bottles, pudding cups, donuts, and paper products in many different places at home. Dirty socks and underwear pop up everywhere like a popcorn machine without a lid. In order to remain sane, I have to keep my belongings in order and clean. His lack of cleanliness and organization

drives me bonkers, but he doesn't.

He is always hot and I am always cold. My cold hands shock him with a simple touch and my icicles for feet discourage him from snuggling under a blanket with me. While he likes to sleep with a simple throw blanket in a cold atmosphere, I enjoy snuggling up under four blankets to hibernate in bed throughout the entire night. Our differences in body temperature drives me crazy, but he doesn't.

He is a social butterfly; in public places, he's always talking to someone new or someone he hasn't seen in a while. Whether we're in McDonald's grabbing a spontaneous Oreo McFlurry or in a fancy restaurant on a date, he is able to make conversation with an old high school friend who he hasn't seen in months or one of his dad's friends who haven't seen him since he was a little boy.

Every year, he and I fly down to the palm trees and tropical weather of southern Florida to visit his grandparents. On the three hour direct flight, we always choose the seats next to a window so I can watch as we soar over miniature fields and houses thirty thousand feet above ground. Filling two out of the three seats in a row, there is one vacant seat that is eventually filled with a stranger. He lets me take the less social position next to the window, while he bravely sits in the middle, anxiously waiting to see who he gets to talk to for hours on the trip south. One flight, he spent the entire three hours talking to a guy flying alone who was our age. They talked about his experiences flying alone because he moved away from his home in Florida when he was only eighteen years old. He moved to the colder weather of Sioux Falls and was thriving in his interest in electronics. While they conversed about the reason they were on the flight, I caught a cat nap with my headphones on, blocking out everything and everyone. Another flight, he sat next to a middle-aged woman. Over the course of a couple hours, he learned all about their plans of heading north for a week with her husband and kids, who were in the row right across from us. It was the start of their family vacation, where they were going to rent a minivan and a cabin and take in the nature of the Midwest states. His ability to talk to anyone and everyone without feeling uncomfortable brings out the little green jealousy monster in me and drives me nuts; he doesn't.

He has to be dressed in jeans in public, and never sweatpants. Wearing sweatpants in public looks "lazy" to him, while wearing sweatpants every day is a personal dream of mine. Getting dressed up has never been my guilty pleasure, and it isn't his either, but he still finds the will power to put on jeans to avoid looking "lazy" in public. His disapproval of sweatpants in public drives me crazy, but he doesn't.

He is a great cook with a vast knowledge of spices and rubs. He can throw together a great meal out of left-over frozen hashed browns and steak bites, while I can make mac'n'cheese. He was thrown into the work force at fifteen years old as a cook at a small-town bar. While he excels in making actual meals, I can whip up a pan of chocolate brownies with gooey caramel and chocolate sauce dripping out of the sides for dessert. His experience in the kitchen

drives me crazy, but he doesn't.

He is the type of person that lives life without stress or worry. "Whatever happens, happens" seems to be his life motto, where I desire to have control over where the vase of pheasant feathers looks best in his living room or how the pillow lies on the couch, and the unknown and uncontrollable are very stressful. His laid-back personality brings me back to earth and calms the storm waves in my mind. His ability to resist stress makes me wonder why I am the way I am, and that drives me bonkers, but he doesn't.

He is not a high-maintenance person who always needs the biggest and the best things in life. He lives a simple life with all of the necessities, and he's happy with it. He drives a 1995 green Chevy truck, he lives in an older house that could use some fixing-up, his wardrobe doesn't consist of Calvin Klein or Ralph Lauren, and he's okay with it. His low-maintenance attitude can sometimes drive me crazy, but he doesn't.

He has a quick temper when you tell him that you'll go hunting with him and later decide against it, but he doesn't get very upset often. When I'm upset, my feelings build and build until they seem to spill out of my mouth like the Niagara Falls and I hold onto a grudge for the next few days. On the other hand, he becomes upset, lets it all out, and then the moment is over. His temper can drive me crazy, but he doesn't.

He can easily read my thoughts and feelings as if they were placed in a book and set directly in front of him. He knows when I'm feeling stressed, so he responds by speaking kindly and subtly to me. When I become upset because I didn't play as well as I wanted to in my volleyball game, he waits for a private moment to talk about it and bring me out of my slump. He knows my facial expressions like he knows the many different species of ducks. Although I wish sometimes that he didn't know me so well, I am thankful for it. His ability to easily read my expressions drives me nuts, but he doesn't.

He is very protective of me and the people he loves. If we are in a crowded place, he walks slightly behind me with a hand tucked in the small of my back. He makes sure that I get places safely when I am traveling alone. If I am stuck on the side of the road with an overheated engine, he tries to get to me as soon as possible. Although he is overprotective of me and it sometimes drives me bonkers, he doesn't.

He has the ability to drive me crazy in so many ways, both consciously and naturally. Consciously, he drives me crazy by leaving his dirty dishes in the sink for weeks on end. Naturally, he drives me crazy with his ease of talking to everyone and anyone. All of these actions drive me crazy, but only on the surface. On a deeper level, I appreciate that he knows exactly how to respond to me, whether I've broken down crying or if I'm stressing over tomorrow's accounting test. I appreciate his cooking skills, especially when he offers to cook a meal for me once in a while. I appreciate his protectiveness and the way he looks after me, as if I was his last half-dollar coin in his pocket. I appreciate his dorky jokes and the snorts of laughter that sneak out uncontrollably when I really get going. If it were anyone else doing these things, they would actually

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drive me crazy. I could only handle that person for a few minutes, then I would have to smile politely, come up with an excuse, and get out of there as fast as the Tasmanian devil. But instead of focusing on all of the things that I would have him do differently, I focus on his blue eyes and crooked smile and remember all of the reasons why I love him.

Honorable Mention

As Summer Fades

By Amie Adams, Writing and Rhetoric

away from school. Orange City is a great place to go to college, but there is just not enough water here. There are no woods. There is no lake.

My destination: Ingham Lake near Wallingford, Iowa. The place where I truly feel at home. I load up my car with the essentials—hammock, sleeping bag, journal, a giant jar of trail mix, camera, a couple water bottles, my best friend—and leave the unnecessary things behind—homework, stress, frustration with the monotony of college life. I am heading for the woods. If I skip cross country practice and promise my coach to run on my own, I can go. I have less than twenty four hours of freedom.

We drive.

The most gorgeous sunset accompanies us on the final hour of the drive. I keep turning my head to watch the sky burn orange and pink in the distance.

While cresting the hill before the final curve that winds down to the lakes, we get an unexpected (slightly horrifying) surprise. Ducks. Ducks cover the road.

Thankfully, we miss them all.

I turn into a surprisingly full campground for late September. The Indian summer has caused families with their clunky, overpriced campers to come out of the woodwork for one last trek into the woods before the cold really sets in. People. I don't have any patience for them today—especially today. I want the "wilderness" to myself. However, we can have the wilderness to ourselves. I know something that these "tourists" don't.

I pull my silver VW into a spot in the back corner of the campground. Small gravel paths crisscross this patch of land situated between the shores of High Lake to the south, a paved road to the north, the county conservation board's tree farm to the west, and the nature center to the east. Woods line the lakeshore starting from the southwest corner of the campground where I have strategically positioned my car. The thing I know that everyone else doesn't is that the campsite we have chosen lies at the beginning of a hidden trail which snakes back into the woods behind the tree farm, leading to a peninsula. I pull the small tent out of the trunk and set it up next to the pole where the registration tag is clipped. However, we have no intention of sleeping in it. A decoy. The real adventure is in the woods.

We pull on sweatshirts and long pants and transfer the essentials into

our backpacks—blankets, flashlights, hammocks, our pocket knives, lighter fluid; and of course, Starbursts. I loop my headlamp around my neck but leave it off as we slip onto the trail. Whether or not we're technically allowed back here is up for debate, but two things are working in our advantage. One, the "No Trespassing" sign that is usually tacked to the fallen log that partially obscures the trail from view is nowhere to be found. Two, I am wearing my Ingham Lake Bible Camp hoodie. I am hoping that in the off-chance we run into anyone who questions us, I can nicely explain that I've worked at the Bible camp across the road for the past three summers and that we've always been allowed to spend the night out here with our campers.

Walking out into the darkness with the lake on either side, bird calls echo in the night. To our right is a place of legend—Bird Island. One scraggly green tree somehow survives on this meager island that is not much more than decomposing bird excrement and some loose topsoil mixed with the sandy lake bottom. The dead trees that rise out of it house hundreds of bird nests on their pale white branches. The black birds congregate high in the branches while the white birds tend to float on the water below, sentries in the sky and patrol below them.

Completing the canoe voyage to Bird Island is a hero's tale at camp. In order to reach this desolate place, you must pass through the infamous Butterfly Tunnel. Named for the sole purpose of tricking the campers into thinking that it is a nice place, Butterfly Tunnel is notorious for its spiders. On a trip through it during Outdoor Adventure camp, I had the unfortunate experience of encountering a wolf spider. Passing through this low-lying culvert that connects Ingham Lake to Cunningham Slough is the first step in reaching the island. From there, Cunningham Slough connects to High Lake (the home of Bird Island) by a similar tunnel.

There is truly no purpose to setting foot on Bird Island except to say that you have accomplished it. I am convinced that once you smell Bird Island, you can never un-smell it. The stench of bird droppings and rotting fish is completely overwhelming, but there are worse things on the island. In 2012, on my maiden voyage with a group of other counselors, I had the unfortunate experience of distressing a bird to the point that it almost committed suicide. We watched a black, long-necked bird climb from its nest as we approached the island. It scrambled up to a forked branch and proceeded to fit its neck into the V as we watched with horror. The bird struggled there as we paddled closer and other birds circled the island, squawking frantically. Finally, the bird stopped moving altogether, convincing us that our mere presence had caused its death. We quickly jabbed our paddles into the muck, hopped out of the canoe to prove that we could put our feet on the island and live to tell the tale, and then raced the other boat back toward the point. A quick glance back to ensure that we weren't being chased by an armada of birds revealed the deception. The bird had only attempted, or perhaps faked, its suicide. As we watched, it climbed out of the death V, completely unharmed and hopped back onto its nest. A scare tactic. We were shocked.

However, the point, not Bird Island, is our destination for tonight. We will camp on a grassy, tree-lined peninsula that juts out into the lake at a safe distance from the sights (and the smells) of Bird Island. The trail turns away from the island as we continue walking in the dark, but the birds still squawk in the distance. I'm glad I'm not completely alone.

We are far enough away from the campground that I can turn my headlamp on without the light being seen by anyone, but I don't actually need it to find the way. Two more turns, one tunnel-like section of trees, and we have arrived on the open plain of the point. The stars are stunning. Dizzily bright. I stop for a moment and stare at the heavens. I am at a loss for words to describe the vastness and the beauty of what lies above me. Instead, I turn my attention to finding the best trees to hang hammocks from, and we set to work.

With our camp established in the trees, we turn to our next priority—a fire. Surprisingly, a collection of wood has already been placed in the fire ring. Perfect, aside from the part where a couple stones are missing from the circle. I walk down to the end of the point and fish a couple big rocks from the lake to complete the ring. My companion squirts a little lighter fluid on the pristine teepee of wood and a small fire instantly blazes in front of us. I pull out the Swiss army knife that I got in Yellowstone and begin whittling the end of a stick to a sharp point. Finished, I impale a pink Starburst on it and poke it into the fire. Roasted Starbursts. The most life-changing thing after the love of Jesus Christ. No exaggeration. The taste of the perfectly roasted Starburst (caramelized on the outside and melted on the inside) brings back a flood of memories from the summer.

As I curl up into my hammock, I pull out the journal that I kept over the summer and flip through the already well-worn pages, memories rushing in and receding like the waves that lap against the point on this windy, September night as I begin to read.

June 8:

What a great weekend. Ingham has a kayak. I dipped my paddle into the glassy water and broke up the perfect reflections of the white, fluffy clouds in the sky. The sharp yellow nose sliced through the water with a precision that never happens when I'm in a canoe with campers. I slid across the water from the beachfront to the island in a mere five minutes.

I got to the Ingham island and I felt like I was the only person on Earth. I've never been there by myself before. Walking among the trees, praying aloud, I felt like I was Eve walking around in the Garden of Eden. The stillness, silence, and emptiness made me sigh with relief. Peace.

June 21:

This is what I wish the rest of my life could be like. I'm in lying in my hammock on the island. A summer breeze shakes the leaves as they rustle on the trees like whispers. Gentle waves lap the shore, regular and constant. Sum-

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mer birds twitter in the forest behind the ridge that I've managed to balance myself on. Rachel is somewhere on the other side of the island; we have an unspoken agreement to share this silent sanctuary. I am home.

God, I am here in your love and there's no place I'd rather be. I am restored to the joy of salvation here. This is what I was made for. I was made for You, Jesus. Only You. So many other things have taken root and flourished out of this love. The ability to feel Your touch in a warm breeze. Recognizing Your hand in the sunset. The colors were so rich last night that we breathed them in. The reflection of you in others may be the most breath-taking, Lord. Thank You for awakening me, opening my eyes to this new life. Thank you for teaching me to be content and satisfied in You. Let all the campers see You in me this summer, Lord. I am only who You have made me to be. You are beautiful. This place truly is so sacred, God.

July 23:

I am already so homesick for this place, but I haven't even left. How can I write the trees out my window or the lake breeze in such a way that they won't seem like a dream come winter? I never want this summer sun to set. I never want to say goodbye to these brothers and sisters who love me. The changing of seasons, the turning of pages, and the ticking of clocks is tearing my heart to pieces. Every year it gets harder to say goodbye. Every summer my roots sink deeper into this fertile soil.

July 29:

The canoe trip was fabulous last night. The point was perfect. I've never been cozier in my hammock. Waking up under the trees and the bluest of skies. Falling asleep under the stars and swimming at sunset. I got to lead the group of campers and help everyone through the second tunnel between Cunningham and High Lake after I cleared a branch and rocks from it. We moved a fallen tree out of the way on the point and I directed setting up camp. Chase made oatmeal for breakfast. This morning I saved (well...almost saved) a canoe that drifted away by jumping in the lake fully clothed, swimming out to grab it with my flannel still on. The campers wanted to go to Bird Island, but we told them no. Still, we are having so many adventures; God is good.

How am I going to remember all of this? I want my whole life to be like this week. I wish that the sky could be the first thing that I see every morning. I want to always be this close to nature, this close to reality, this close to God. I can't believe camp will be over in four more days. Why do summers always have to end?

My eyes linger on that question before I shut the journal. I still don't know why summers always have to end. Recalling my hopes that God would lead me to something greater after the end of the summer sends me analyzing the past two months. In my heart, there's still no place that I'd rather be than

right here. Falling asleep under the stars and waking up to the brilliant blue sky. I drift off with questions rattling in my head.

The next morning, before we leave, I perform the sacred ritual that any trip to Ingham requires—jumping fully clothed into the lake. It may be a breezy September morning and the water has already fallen well below any comfortable swimming temperature, but it doesn't matter. It will be such a long time before I get to do this again.

I walk down the point to its sandy nose and step off into the water. An underwater sandbar stretches all the way to the opposite shore of the lake, so as long as I stay on its small path, I can walk out into the very center of the lake and only be up to my thighs in the water. I wade out, Bird Island to my right. I ignore its foreboding presence and focus on the sun and the waves. As I get used to it, the water isn't actually too bad. But mostly, I am ecstatic to be standing in it. I raise my arms above my head and offer a prayer to God.

I miss You. I want to be close to You, always. I'm sorry that I've strayed. Where are You leading me, exactly? How can I stay close to You and serve You in the mundane and hectic routines of life and college? Help me see You everywhere, Lord. I am empty. I am lonely. I miss You. I need to be close to You. Bring me back. Renew me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation. Cleanse me.

And then I jump. Arms out in front of me like a diver, I leap off the point into the drop off. The cold water shocks me and I come up feeling more alive than I have in the past two months. For the first time in a long time, I feel hopeful.

My Garbage Sister is Starting to Look Nice

By Alice Church, Sociology

My sister Ellen and I used to be some form of “best friends.” Neither of us have ever really advocated for the term, as we viewed it to be both exclusionist and somewhat immature, but nevertheless, we each held an awareness that of all the friends we had, we were often closest to each other.

Although three and a half years separate my older sister and me, I’ve rarely felt the difference. Sometimes, when my parents let her do things that I couldn’t, I felt it. When they let her go to summer camp, to youth group, to the birthday parties that I was apparently too young for. Other times, when she tried to pull rank on me, I felt it. When she would tell me to go to bed early, to do whatever she said, just because she was older. But most of the time, our respective ages just weren’t something I thought about. She was her, I was me, and we were friends.

But like probably most siblings, we did fight sometimes. I bickered with all of my sisters at some point in our childhoods. But with Ellen I fought the most. It would rarely last very long, but would usually get ugly (to the extent that a fight between moderately well-behaved adolescents can) quickly. In my memories, I never know who was at fault. But I do blame her for the fights getting as bad as they did. I suppose it was never too big of a deal. I certainly can’t remember what a single fight was about; I just remember them getting to a point at which she would exclaim that she hated me, and I would respond in kind. But for some reason, my mirroring of her words was enough to break her anger and send her to my mother, to tell on me for my proclamation of hate. But a couple of hours after that, we would be right back to being as good of friends as ever; there was no making up past the apologies my mother forced us to say, just an invitation to play together, and an awareness that things were good between us again.

Ellen has always loved to fight. Once, she made the mistake of admitting to me that sometimes she just likes fighting, and will pursue a fight for no other reason than her own enjoyment. I distinctly remember the beginning of an argument between the two of us, although as usual, I don’t know what we were fighting about. The moment I realized we were about to have another fight, we were standing in the study of our old farmhouse and sunlight was streaming in through the window, lighting up Ellen’s face as it began to shift into a familiar angry shape. Seeing where our disagreement was headed, I unthinkingly asked Ellen if she was just fighting with me because she enjoyed it. It took me about a fifth of a second to realize my mistake, which quickly

became apparent as the fury seeped into her face. It was a mistake I made only once.

As we grew older, we fought less. Maybe it was because we both matured as human beings, maybe it was because she moved out of my parents' house and we saw each other less – still often, usually a couple days every week, but few enough times that we saw less of the things that annoyed us about each other. As we aged, we would go longer and longer without fighting. Occasionally something would come up – I can never quite remember what – and we would be frustrated with each other for a few days, but still, it never lasted long. We have always managed to remain friends.

In more recent years, I have considered doing things I knew would start fights with Ellen: questioning her romantic relationships, bringing up social issues we disagreed on, or simply admitting that an opinion of mine differed from one of her own. But I keep myself from doing these things. I have found that even when my intention is good, Ellen does not want to hear if I think she is making a wrong decision, or if my opinions on her current boyfriend are a strong contrast to her own. So I have kept my opinions to myself on the things most important to her. Sometimes this has felt tiring, exhausting even, when she would come to me crying because the person she decided to fall in love with had disappointed her, an event I saw coming from the start. But nevertheless, I have thought it better that I keep my mouth closed, rather than open it when I know that would only result in a fight, not actual consideration of the words I have spoken. So at the cost of a level of honesty, our friendship has remained fairly stable for the last few years.

I should have seen it coming, then. "It" being the fight that started, lasted, and eventually diffused into an awkward relationship that I can't quite bring myself to label as "friendship" anymore. This past summer is when I first became aware of the distance between us, but according to her, it had really begun over a year before that. I should have seen it coming. I knew we'd become more distant – less phone calls, less texting, less *talking* – but I wasn't seeing that as an inherently negative thing; rather, it seemed natural that as we geographically separated, the four-hour driving distance between us, and our respective obligations would limit our interactions. Still, I should have seen it coming. I saw the beginnings of it, but I attributed it to the wrong things; maybe she was distant because of her divorce, maybe because of her son's failing health. Somehow, unbeknownst to me but scorchingly obvious to her, I had not been there enough for her. I say "somehow," but I know how – school is the easy answer, and it is not inaccurate. But more accurate would be the admission that within the last few months I had made the conscious decision to focus on myself; to stop taking every phone call, to stop waiting until one in the morning to start homework because all of the hours before that and been spent making time for others. Perhaps worst of all, I decided to focus on my own mental health more than on my sister's.

Ellen once told me that it is important to put oneself first, as long as it does not come at the cost of others. But isn't the act of putting oneself first,

by definition, an act that comes at the cost of others? I had found that after an exhausting amount of time putting other people first, I wanted to try focusing on myself. Not in all areas, but in enough that apparently it was noticeable to the others, to the people I was putting second.

That wasn't the only thing that I suspect had awakened the divide between my sister and myself, though. Along with deciding to prioritize myself, I had also made the decision to be more honest, even if only slightly. So this time, when Ellen asked me what I thought of her new boyfriend, instead of expressing that if she's happy then it must be good, I was honest. Well, sort of honest. Because even with the decision to be open and truthful, I didn't want to make her mad. So I dressed up my honesty, made it less truthful but more consumable; I told her that it wasn't that I *disliked* her boyfriend, but that I simply didn't have a reason to *like* him yet. But the shift in honesty levels was apparently both noticeable and noticed. Ellen saw me as becoming not only more distant, but *colder*. She likes to use that word a lot, *cold*. To her, being cold is one of the worst things a person can be. On multiple occasions she has expressed that she never wants to become *cold*, a heavy emphasis placed to ensure I know the weight of the word. But on multiple occasions she has called me *cold*, matter-of-factly and without emphasis because it is not needed, because I *know* the weight of the word when it is used on me.

I should have seen it coming. Maybe a part of me did see it coming, but I certainly didn't anticipate the way it arrived. It was August or July, a birthday celebration for someone or someones. The whole family had gathered at my parents' small home to celebrate, and it had been going nicely – not even a mild disagreement among the ten of us there. My sisters and I were outside, talking with each other and playing with my niece and nephew who were in the yard. I was riding my niece's scooter around on my parents' driveway at the moment when Ellen came up to me to tell me that she had started smoking cigarettes. Without considering the consequences, I simply replied, "Okay, well, I think that's dumb." Then I scooted away on a ridiculously undersized pink Barbie scooter, one leg stretched out awkwardly for comedic effect.

I've always felt that I could judge my level of friendship with someone on whether or not I could be mean to them. Not mean in the sense of true cruelty, but in a joking sort of way. If an acquaintance asks my opinion of their attire, I might answer that they look nice. If a friend asks me the same question, I would likely respond by telling them that they look like absolute garbage. This is just the way I speak, and if we are friends, you know this, and you know that to look like garbage is often, if not always, to look good.

But Ellen was furious at my response to her new habit. I don't know what she was looking for, what she anticipated, or if she wanted support or pity. All I know is that this is the Great Event that created the rift between us, that reduced my sister's status from some form of "best friend" to "cautionary friendly acquaintance."

I have been given a perfect, serendipitous weekend—a perfect combination of warm weather and minimal homework—and I am using it to run

Sharp as Diamonds: The Sunday of May 10, 2015

By Hana Spangler, Theatre & History

The compliment and the correction lay in flashes on my heart, my heartstrings taut. And back and forth across my heart, my thoughts wove its conflict into textile. I sat alone—my mother too spent to attend the Mother's Day sermon, my father with a headache I had expected, my sister teaching a dozen or so fourth-graders to be obedient to their parents. Even the man who delivered my reprimand left my side quickly. Alone, I questioned myself—my own voice.

His voice was still cut into my heart. "When you sing at full volume," it began. As if he saw a knob on the side of my neck—that I could just thumb it down to keep my voice from distracting the hundreds within our congregation and drawing attention away from the worship leaders, as he said it did. That I had a "good heart" was a comfortless addendum to a powerful criticism from a voice of recognized authority. Now I, no longer able to be ignorant of how that good heart's heartsong stung others, felt his words tugging shut my voice, straining my seams.

But one of those worship leaders had just encouraged me—my voice. Along with the rest of the team, she led the songs of prayer before the service proper, and I sang with her in jubilation, my harmony like the swallow dipping, weaving over the bridge before returning beneath to nest. The few of us gathered in the looming sanctuary—of course she heard me. And because she heard me, her heart was made glad. As a prophetess, she stepped forward and addressed us from the LORD. That address likened the listeners to precious jewels—unique in our attributes, sturdy in our construction, and shining in our hearts. After we sang, our hearts had touched each other's. She approached to tell me to never lose that unbound joy with which I sang.

Both of these made sure to catch me before the service began. And both were leaders—recognized instruments of God. This tore within me—the textile to tatters, stretched too far. Like my biblical namesake, the mother-to-be of Samuel, I wept bitterly as my unvoiced prayers rose with the embarrassed heat of my body. Even in my pain, I felt a wry note of vindication; instead of distracting with my singing, I had branched out into sobbing. I hadn't thought a handkerchief would be necessary when I readied myself for church, so my prayers also fell down as warm tears unstemmed, darkening my dress's bright flowers in cooling splashes. I held my head down, braced against the seat in front of me, gazing at my lap's own sky blue, rosehip reds and yellows, leafing green. And the strands of clear mucus, another byproduct of my sustained distress, had nowhere to go but down my throat into a sluggish stomach or down after the tears; these prayers smeared snailtracks along printed stems.

Then I despaired, for as my pain filled my vision, I felt that surely everyone would see everything but the prayers—and then more despair, that no one would see even that. What kind of a church allowed a member to cry alone? This is the LORD's house—not even the barren Hannah cries alone.

Instead of a worried flock of Eli's kind coming to convict me of drunkenness, I looked up to find several concerned women—the ancient, ageless prophetesses and dancers with hair of silver and gold and bronze. "Can you tell us what's wrong?" But I couldn't—so close to the service beginning, I couldn't possibly lay out the situation, even in such brief exchange. It ran too deep, and they could see I had no words for it, so they told me to never mind and just prayed for peace. I came, wiping bits of prayer off my hands and onto my dress, and sat by them, as they generously bid.

That worship was the hardest I've faced. What I could hear of my voice was only a creeping waver; I cried out in song, more a whisper than a wail, my distress forcing my voice to comply with its painful instruction. But flanked by gracious, prayerful hearts, my yoke was eased. In the moment, it was impossible for me to confront the issue with intellect, and every song allowed me to petition simply—an unloading of these thought-scrapes that clung to my wounds from the double-encounter.

Sitting down to sermon, my chest ached, but my breath no longer caught in my throat, and I turned back to my own thoughts. The contradiction of feedback was mirror to so many times in my life when others have responded—a balance of stabbing pain and brilliant joy, one quickly following the other. Why would my creator give me a gift and then never specify whether it was blessing or curse? Why must I rely on human tongues, which stand in disagreement so often? I didn't want an answer or a compromise. I needed comfort. Although I didn't intend to take many notes, I tentatively penciled a box on my page to commemorate the occasion:

Be still
Be at peace
The LORD pushes
The LORD catches

But my own words, meant to comfort myself, cut my soul. Meanwhile, our pastor spoke on how we are not defined by what we do, but rather by what Christ has done for us. A relief to hear, and harder than I thought to accept, that my voice is not myself. Or perhaps I was naturally calming down—it didn't matter much. I just needed to survive, and my hand automatically drew the circular mind-map which is ever my template. It could be hard, looking at my spider-looped notes, to see the pain from that day behind its scrawl; it looks much the same as any other week. But since I was there, I know to look for another box, this one relating to a parable in Matthew:

He buys our
field to
gain our
treasure

My heart, torn. My bodily fluids, drained. My eyes, weary. My voice, broken. And who am I? When I feel my voice destroys the holy weave of the world, who am I? I am the only treasure of the field. I am the diamond incorrupt. I am the pearl worth a merchant's livelihood. I am also a woman who prays in her heart when the sound of her own voice moves her to tears.

Hannah replied. "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Eli answered, "Go in peace."



Cliffside Dwelling

By Kali Wolkow, Journalism & Graphic Design

Picture Perfect Roses

By Hartrick Tarr, Literature

I remember thinking whoever cut the grass took his time. Not saying he was slow, but rather he was careful. Saying Mr. Waterman was slow would imply he did not have the mental capacity to take care of his yard. This was not the case. If he wasn't capable, his wife was capable, or his other three sons would have been capable for him. If I were to guess, I would suggest the second son might have cut the grass, because he was the slowest among them. It could have been any of them that took time to cut the grass or none of them, I am not sure, because I wasn't there when they cut it. But whoever did cut the grass must have done it for the entire neighborhood because every blade was equal and every edge of each lawn was sharp. The bushes were well rounded and the trees were nicely pruned. I am no expert in pruning trees, but I assume keeping the strong branches, which enhance the beauty of the young tree, was the desired outcome. This mysterious gardener must have specialized, I assumed, in equality. He must have made sure every yard had the same treatment, otherwise that would have caused controversy. You can understand why that would have caused frustration among neighbors, because a beautiful yard tells a lot about a person. The neighbor with the most perfectly aligned trees, roundest bushes and best-manicured lawn must have more capital and the best groomed children. A person's character is shown by his yard, or so I have been told. I have also been told that cleanliness is close to Godliness.

From what I have seen and from the flowers that surrounded the House, The Watermans, from the outside, were the cleanest and closest to God in the whole neighborhood. The other neighbors underestimated the value of flowers. Take a rose for example, despite its ugly and nasty thorns, you can't help but notice the lush, red pulsating heartbeat of the petals. There is nothing more that attracts a visitor like me than flowers. Though the flowers were what many call beautiful, they were not the only reason I was at the Waterman Home. I do not remember why I was at the Watermans'. I do remember standing in the middle of the well-manicured yard with my ashy knees and my short, brown chopstick legs. I felt out of place because it wasn't my place, also because I wasn't well rounded and my character was far from perfectly aligned. The large, light yellow House from the outside looked playful and welcoming. This was the type of house that the smell of something sweet always seemed to emerge from. It was a Home where after baseball, ice cold lemonade awaited. It was the type of House you expected to find a blueberry pie on the window. The House had many windows, all of them closed with blinds except one big window. This window, large and clear, looked like a glassy, shallow lake. Through this window, you could see a small table with expensive looking chairs surrounding it. Like any creature in a new environment I moved toward the white

door with caution. I turned and saw my dad's brown hands wave as he drove off.

My dry knuckles tapped the door a couple of times until it slowly opened. A pointy nosed boy with curly hair and the largest head greeted me. I wasn't sure if it was his actual head or the hair that made it look so massive. I have come to the conclusion that it might have been a little bit of both. His name was Samuel Waterman; he was the middle child. He loved playing with little things, such as cards and board games. I call them little things because he didn't play chess or any card games that challenged the mind, but rather played games for those who already have challenged minds. Despite all his challenges, he was intelligent nonetheless. His eyes widened and a strange smile came on his face. He smiled like a kid who has just seen a new toy. He frantically waved his arms as he told me to come on in. I remembered why I was there; I was there so the children could play with me. I took off my shoes. To my surprise there was no sign saying "shoes please." I took them off anyways because I did not want to get dirt on their floor. There is no good that can come from dirt on a floor. The only thing dirt is good for is planting roses.

Everyone else in the House had shoes on. The simple act of taking off my shoes, in my opinion, was a good deed. I did not think too much of the deed besides a better way to be more pleasant in the eyes of God. As I walked into the house I could see dust particles floating in the air like pollen. It was not what I expected, to be honest. Everything looked out of place from the inside. There were baseball bats and helmets on the floor. The dusty wooden floor creaked when you walked on it. The cabinets and drawers were cracked and plastic cups and books seemed to be everywhere. The walls had no paintings on them, just loosely hung pictures of the family members. The wooden floor that looked like the carpenter forgot to polish had little splinters shooting out. I realized why everyone wore shoes in this house.

Mr. Waterman approached me. He was wearing gloves as if he had just got done planting. He had a similar body shape to a dandelion. His head was the biggest in the family. He took off his gloves and shook my hand firmly. He asked me what I thought of his garden and the yard. When people ask you what you think, they often want a compliment, not a critique. You have to cover the truth because sometimes it pricks and causes pain. Lying, however, is sinful and more importantly (for lack of better word) it is unclean. I certainly do not want to lie and distance myself from the clean Creator. So I answered, and I told him it looked like everyone else's. I certainly did not want to cause controversy among the neighbors. Not knowing what to make of my answer, he smiled and told me that his other two boys would be with me shortly.

I remember how intelligent the other two boys were. They taught me how to cut steak properly, the right posture to be in at the table. They always knew the right types of food to eat, and they told me to avoid potato chips because they had hydrogenated oils. They told me that since they were homeschooled, they were able to learn without restriction and most importantly they could freely worship God. However, what I was most impressed by was their

keen eyesight. They could tell me what I was doing wrong as soon as I began to do it. Anytime they met me, they could always find my mistakes. They would notice if my collar was not correct, if my lips were oily from potato chips, or if the symbols on my shirt were demonic or too secular for their liking. They could spot my flaws immediately, almost as if they were searching for them. This vision is something that the whole family possessed. They knew so much that I often equated the size of their heads to their intelligence. Intelligence can do that sometimes. One with too much knowledge sometimes grows a huge head. I often wondered if it was difficult to hold all that knowledge on a man's neck.

I don't vividly remember playing with the three boys, partially because they played with me not the other way around, but I do remember what happened after. If I were to remember anything from inside that dusty, cracked, and creaking house, it would probably be the visitor I met that Day. We all sat in the nice chairs, the only nice chairs in the house, which were ironically by the largest window with opened blinds. Mrs. Waterman sat there with her legs crossed holding her Bible. The three boys squeezed together on the couch and Mr. Waterman was across from them with his glasses and his gray hairs consuming his dark ones. There was a knock on the door and a girl walked in. She stood and looked around for a while; she too must have been surprised to find that the inside was not like the outside of the House. Mr. Waterman asked her to keep her shoes on claiming that the splinters on the ground were like thorns. She complimented Mr. Waterman on his yard and proceeded to sit down. Mr. Waterman turned his head towards me and introduced her. He said her name was Shelby Evett. I have seen many beautiful things, but not anything like her.

Her hair was long, lush and dark as coffee. She had marble brown eyes, her nose was slender like her body, and her smile was milky white. She stood up calmly, and as if she had wings, she effortlessly floated towards me. Her voice was soft and her lips moved slowly. If I were to just touch her lips I would taste the honey on them. She had these little dots on her face. The dots looked like someone dipped a small brush in paint and flicked their wrist, allowing the residue to fall on her cheeks. They were called freckles; you could hardly notice them. But I noticed every inch of her. Her cheeks were nice and round. Though I had brown twig fingers, she shook my hands. I didn't squeeze because I was scared I might crush her soft hands. She was beautiful from the outside.

The sun fell and we carried on with the Bible study under a lamp that Mrs. Waterman turned on. Mr. Waterman read from Matthew 15:13 and from Mark 7. I paid no attention. My focus was on her. I would not call it love at first sight, but if there was such a thing, I was experiencing it. There was something different about her; I could not quite put my fingers on it. Maybe I didn't want to put my fingers on it. I don't know if it was something I saw about her or maybe her words, which were like Nectar, and an insect like me couldn't help but suck it in. The study must have gone by quickly or else I paid too much attention to Shelby. I remember bright car lights shining through the window and cutting

through the darkness in the little room. The honks from the car made everyone turn their heads toward the window. My time with Shelby was up. I thanked Mr. and Mrs. Waterman and the three boys. The light revealed the little cracks that were on the wall. The dust particles fluttered more vividly in the air under the illuminating beam from the car. The splinters also seemed to increase in number under the light. I took my time on the way to the door making sure I didn't step on any of them. I looked back at Shelby one more time and her eyes were begging me to stay. I felt a little prick under my foot. I quickly put on my shoes that were by the baseball helmets and hurried out the door. I turned and looked back at the house with all its little windows. In the night the flowers were not visible and the yellow paint looked gray. The only clear and visible thing was the large window with its nice chairs and Mr. Waterman's big headed boys waving. I noticed Shelby in the window. She was standing still; she looked so sweet and innocent. Looking through the window, I realized it was the perfect picture. I am not at all a cameraman, but if I were to compare a picture to anything I would compare it to a trap. You try to capture an object; sometimes you succeed and sometimes you don't. I am just glad I was able to run away. I jumped in the car and greeted my father.

Shadows

By Eloa Cook, Criminal Justice

I had a really bad panic attack last night. I was hearing voices yesterday when I was alone in my room. Normally when I'm in our room, it's my safe place. It's not anymore. Last night I had a hard time falling asleep.

I had seen them occasionally since I was a child. My mom told me that it was normal for people who had suffered sexual abuse to see shadows. I took her word for it. I would see them, acknowledge them in my head, and continue on with whatever it was that I was doing. That was, until they decided that they didn't want to just stop by occasionally. They wanted to talk to me. Change their shape. Make sure that I noticed them.

I knew deep down that it was all my fault: the depression, the anxiety, the panic attacks. I wasn't strong enough. I felt I wasn't worth the air I breathed.

I woke up at 12:30 a.m. to discover I was having a panic attack. Again. This time was different than all the other times. I was trying to control my breathing, calm myself down. Just when I almost fell back asleep, I would hear the voices yelling at me, keeping me up. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw these demonic faces looking, smiling at me.

I thought about taking my Ativan, but I didn't know if the voices would stop or if the faces would go away if I took it. So, I didn't. I felt like I would throw up and I was shivering.

My roommate and I, who were best friends before we decided to room together, began to have serious problem. (Which only helped to make these shadows worse.) I was finally allowed to move out of my room and into a new room with the optimistic Miss Eliza. She could never just be Eliza, but she had to be Miss Eliza. She was the birds chirping on a spring day, reminding me that there is life and it is beautiful. *Why am I feeling this way? I have the love and support. What's wrong with me?*

We hadn't been rooming together for very long when I started to feel off, not really depressed, but just not right. Those birds singing on a spring day weren't giving me the happy notes, rather the annoying, off-pitched shrieks. I knew I had many friends who loved me and they did their best to make me feel wanted and involved. I wished that this love alone would make me feel better, but it didn't. Sometimes knowing this would only make it worse.

I thought about the midnight walk I had taken with two of my wing-mates at the cemetery. I love walking in cemeteries during the day, reading the tombstones, looking at their designs, and enjoying the serenity of the place. I thought it would be kind of like Supernatural, going to a graveyard at night... only there wouldn't be killer ghosts after me. My wing-mates were talking about the last time they had been there and where a war memorial was on the

site. Everything was pitch black. We could see the streets framing the cemetery that were bordered with the weird yellow glow of the street lights. We needed flashlights in order to stumble our way through.

After we were a ways in, towards the center, I felt a cold wind. *Stop it, I told myself, if ghosts do exist, they would also be around in the daytime. Relax. You're with other people. You'll be fine.* I took a reassuring breath and continued on talking with my wing-mates and tripping over every blade of grass. But I just could not shake this feeling that I was being watched. I swore I was hearing whispering all around me, whispering that only I was noticing. I tremble as I write this. The memory of the cemetery is cold, and I am left puzzled with no answers, only musings.

After that night, my life returned to its usual: me feeling worthless, me going to counseling, and me having panic attacks. My anti-depressant dosage was upped after I confessed to my physician my feelings and thoughts were only growing blacker like the night at the cemetery. But this still didn't solve what was coming.

The shadows started to reveal themselves everywhere I went. They'd stand in places so I could always see them out the corners of my eyes when I walked to classes. They waited for my return every time I left my room. I thought it was just because of the new dosage might have caused some new side-effect. I tried to write it off, but man, these shadows were so persistent!

I began to worry after a couple days of their insistence. Why were they bothering me so much? Why was I the only one who could see them? Was I becoming schizophrenic like my friend Sarah's father had been? *No, I thought, you'll get through this. You've been through a lot, you got through it. Pull yourself together. You're not crazy. You know these things aren't real.*

Tonight, Sarah and I meditated to make the shadows disappear. I had something to kind of focus on, but I was still very irritated at myself that I couldn't work through it on my own. Sarah offered me to sleep in her room in case I was afraid of sleeping in my bed. I had calmed down enough that I assured her I would be fine. But even as I was assuring her I saw a shadow. I didn't tell her because I didn't want her to worry.

Also, I just wanted to sleep.

My shadows have evolved. They were no longer just black masses that resembled people, they took the forms of animals and small children. When that wasn't enough, they started to appear realistically, not just in black, but in life-like color.

I didn't want to tell Sarah about this, I knew how much it would bother her, knowing her father suffered from schizophrenia. She supported me through words and our meditation sessions. It helped me to relax. Sometimes, too much so.

I told her roommate, Alice, too. She also comforted me through words and through her presence.

These two, along with Miss Eliza, were immensely helpful through my struggle. Miss Eliza was the most helpful. On multiple occasions, she told

me, "Just talk to me when you see them. Right when you see them. It'll make it better, less realistic." So that's what I did. Sometimes it felt nice to have this confidant, other times I truly felt like I was crazy, acknowledging these hallucinations.

I finally crawled back into my bed around 1:50 a.m. I turned on my MP3 so I wouldn't hear anything. I don't remember how much longer I was awake after that.

I called my mom later that day to tell her about that night. She was really concerned and called my doctor. At my doctor's request, my mom picked me up and drove me back to the ER in my hometown. The doctor at the ER was mainly concerned with whether or not my voices and shadows were telling me to hurt anyone. When I had convinced him that they weren't, he let a counselor in. The counselor and I talked about my recent stresses, my living situation, my history of abuse, and the hallucinations. I was allowed to stay at home since my mom had the next couple of days off. The doctor wanted me watched around-the-clock and ordered everything sharp in the home to be hidden from me.

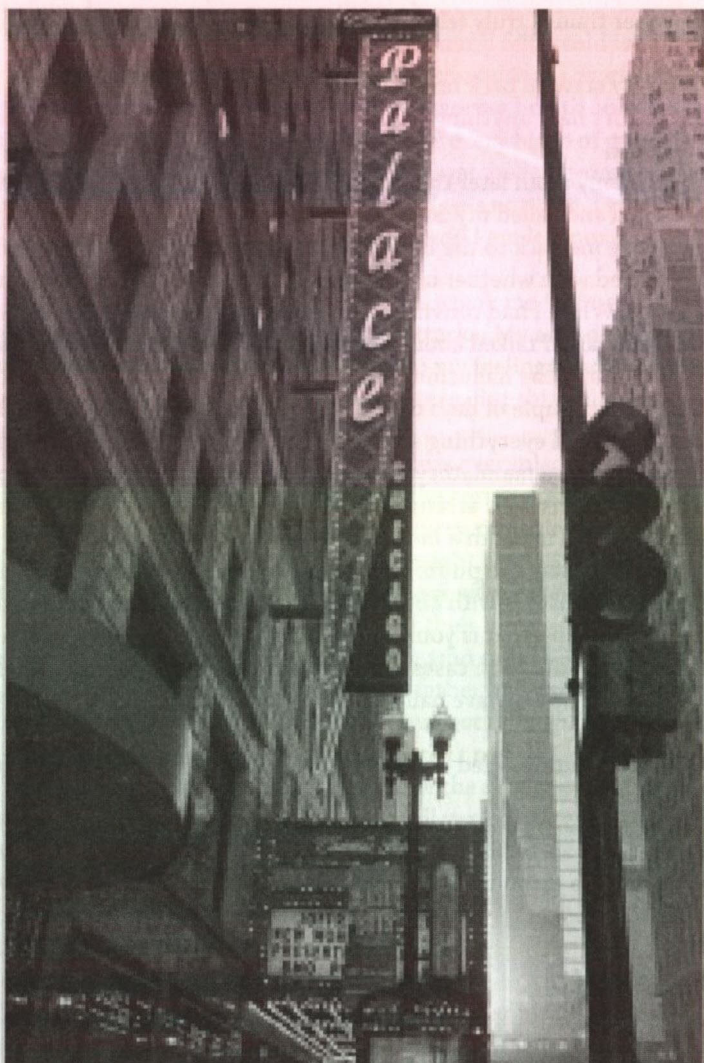
I was taken to mandatory counseling session and a television conference with a psychiatrist was arranged. Once again, I went over my hallucinations. She prescribed me with a medication, but I had to know...

I needed a name to put to this weird nightmare. "It could be multiple things. Given your history with abuse it could be a late onset of PTSD. However, I'm not quite sure that is your case. I'm leaning towards depression with psychosis. It's not unusual in cases where someone has depression and they become overly stressed to have hallucinations like you."

Psychotic.

I sat there and smiled on the outside and thanked her. The conference ended.

Psychotic. Me.



Palace

By Caroline Trewet, Theatre

